

The 10 Plagues And The 10 Sefirot

by

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The Plagues And The Sefirot

There are ten plagues and there are ten Sefirot. Each plague corresponds to one Sefirah. The sequence of the ten plagues corresponds to the sequence of the ten Sefirot, starting at the bottom of the tree, at מַלְכוּת, and going to the top of the tree, כְּהֵן, proceeding exactly in reversed order, as it explains to us in the Zohar.

The Holy One, blessed be He, began with the lowest grade, smiting each one in succession with every finger of His hand; and when He reached the highest He Himself passed through Egypt and slew all the first born of the land, as the firstborn represented the highest and choicest grade of all.¹

Now as there are ten crowns above, so likewise are there ten such below; and all are concealed in the three grades symbolized by “the firstborn of Pharaoh,” “the firstborn of the maid servant that is behind the mill,” and “the firstborn of the cattle,” by means of which Pharaoh sought to keep the Israelites captive for ever.²

The Holy One, blessed be He, has produced ten holy crowns above wherewith He crowns and invests Himself, and He is they and they are He, being linked together like the flame and the coal.

Corresponding to these are ten crowns beneath, which are not holy, and which cling to the uncleanness of the nails of a certain holy Crown called Wisdom, wherefore they are called “wisdoms.” We have learned that these ten species of wisdom came down to this world, and all were concentrated in Egypt, save one which spread through the rest of the world.³

This is the reason Pharaoh says to his people

¹ *The Zohar*, Vol 3, (II, 29a), trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 96.

² *The Zohar*, Vol 3, (II, 38a), trans. Maurice Simon and Harry Sperling (London: Soncino Press, 1978), p. 118.

³ Ten kabs (measures) of witchcraft descended to the world; nine were taken by Egypt. Kiddushin 49b.

הָבֵה נְתַחְכְּמָה לָּו

*Come, let us outsmart them.*⁴

Come let us outsmart them, let us be clever over them here means not only by plotting and scheming, not only by deception, but by practicing on the Israelites the חֲכֻמָּה, the wisdoms of Egypt, the black magic arts of Egypt.

There must not be found among you anyone that

- 1. makes his son or daughter to pass through the fire,*
- 2. or that uses divination,*
- 3. a soothsayer,*
- 4. or an enchanter,*
- 5. or a witch,*
- 6. or a charmer,*
- 7. or a medium,*
- 8. or a wizard,*
- 9. or a necromancer.*⁵

They are all species of sorcery, and through them the Egyptians were more skilled in sorcery than all other men. When the Egyptians desired to consort with the demons, they used to go out to certain high mountains and offer sacrifices and make trenches in the ground and pour some of the blood around the trenches and the rest into them and put flesh over it, and bring offerings to the demons. Then the demons used to collect and consort with them on the mountain.⁶

As for the wisdom of Egypt, this is the lower wisdom which is called

*the handmaid behind the millstones*⁷

⁴Exodus, 1:10.

⁵Deuteronomy 18:10.

⁶*The Zohar*, Vol 5, (III, 69b), trans. Maurice Simon and Harry Sperling (London: Soncino Press, 1978), p. 66-67.

⁷Exodus 11:5.

Each plague is designed to spiritually neutralize and annihilate a vice openly practiced in Egypt. The vices neutralized are exactly the vices associated with their respective Sefirot. In this manner the children of Israel become separated from these vices. So when they leave Egypt, the land of limitation and bondage, they have become spiritually elevated and free.

Blood דם

And the Lord spoke to Moses:

*Say to Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thy hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their rivers, upon their canals, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.*⁸

Rashi⁹ explains that their rivers

are flowing rivers such as our own rivers.

Their canals

are pools or gutters which are made by man from the bank of the river to the fields.

And their ponds are

a gathering of waters which do not gush or flow, but remain in one place.

The Zohar tells us that first the gods of a nation are punished and then the nation itself.

Said R. Johanan:

⁸Exodus 7:19.

⁹Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Exodus*, vol. 2, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Exodus 8:19, p. 64.

They had many idols, but their chief god was the Nile, and the Lord executed judgements on them all.

Said R. Abba:

The exposition of R. Johanan is the correct and self-evident one. For we know that first the gods of a nation are punished and then the nation itself. So here, first the Nile and wood and stones were smitten, as Scripture says:

*and there shall be blood throughout the land of Egypt, both in wood and stone,*¹⁰

the wood and stone being the very gods which the Egyptians worshipped.¹¹

Cassuto says that

Vessels of wood and stone were uncommon in Egypt at that time; ... When, however, we consider the fact that the term ‘wood and stone’ usually signifies idols in the Bible, and that the Egyptian priests used to wash the images of their gods in water every day early in the morning, we may possibly conjecture that the sense of the passage is that even the water that was poured that very morning over the idols turned to blood, thus providing another example of mockery at the expense of the Egyptian deities.¹²

We read in Midrash Rabbah

Why were the “waters” first smitten, and with blood? Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians worshipped the Nile, and God said: ‘I will smite their god first and then his people,’ just as the common saying goes: ‘I will smite the gods and their priests will tremble.’¹³

¹⁰Exodus 12:19.

¹¹*The Zohar*, vol. 2, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 58.

¹²Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987), p. 99.

¹³*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 126.

Why did God punish them with blood? To pay them back in their own coin, for ... They did not allow the daughters of Israel to have ritual immersion after their menstruation, so that they should not increase; on this account were they smitten with blood.¹⁴

Rabbi Sorotzkin suggests that the blood was

In vengeance for the Jewish children that the Egyptians had thrown into the River.¹⁵

Nachmanides tells us that

In Pharaoh's sight, all the waters that were in the river turned to blood, and the blood was furthermore throughout all the land of Egypt.¹⁶

The waters represent the life-blood of the land of Egypt, for without the waters of the Nile river, the land would not be fertile. Blood represents the soul of the living, for without blood the living would be soul-less and, therefore, spiritually dead. Turning the waters to blood has the immediate consequence of

*The fishlife that is in the River shall die and the River shall become foul. Egypt will grow weary of trying to drink water from the River.*¹⁷

Sforno says that the turning of the water to blood is not just an illusion, a change in appearance, it is a change in essence.

There will be no form (essence) of water (combined) with the appearance of blood, rather it shall become the essence (form) as well as the appearance of blood; hence the fish will die.¹⁸

¹⁴*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 127.

¹⁵Zalman Sorotzkin, *Insights in the Torah*, Shemos, trans. Ralph Blumberg (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 74.

¹⁶Nachmanides, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, Exodus, trans. Rabbi Charles Chavel, (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), p. 82.

¹⁷Exodus 7:18.

¹⁸Ovadia Sforno, *Sforno: Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987), p. 282.

Therefore, we can conclude that the attempt of Egypt to use the labor, sweat, and blood of the Israelites to support the soul of Egypt is like making the waters of the Nile be blood to support the fertility of the land. The consequence is that the life in the waters will die and the life on the land will become wearisome. It just cannot work.

Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that

Here the Torah hints at what Rabbi Eliezer expounds upon in the Haggadah, that each Plague was made up of four Plagues. First the water “would change to blood” the sight of blood alone is enough to upset people. Then “fish in the River would die” leaving the Egyptians without their staple food. Then “the River would become foul” with an offensive odor. And last “Egypt will grow weary with trying to drink” they would have no water. All in all four plagues.

Following Rabbi Akiva, who says that each Plague was made of five Plagues, we can add the wearisome labor of digging around the River for drinking water which is within the meaning of “Egypt will be wearied.”¹⁹

Rabbi Alshech explains that

The striking by the rod, was to prove that this was an act of God, not another trick, such as the *Chartumim* would perform. There were three distinctions between this miracle, and the kind of thing the magicians were capable of. Their art could change the color of the water, but not its nature. People could continue to drink water discolored by the magicians, whereas they could not drink what had been turned into blood by Moses’ staff. Secondly, the art of the magicians was limited to converting the color of the water in a continuous river bed. Once that water had seeped out, to form ponds in some place, it would not be subject to the magicians’ art. In the case of God’s staff however, all water which had surfaced in Egypt, turned into blood. The third difference was that when the magicians turned water into red water, both

¹⁹Zalman Sorotzkin, *Insights in the Torah*, Shemos, trans. Ralph Blumberg (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 74.

the Egyptians and the Israelites would be seen to scoop up the red liquid. The water transformed by Moses's staff however, was undrinkable only for the Egyptians. The Jews found it perfectly clear and drinkable.

The words *on the water* means that the celestial agent in charge of water, i.e. the *sar shel mayim*, was stricken, hence the real, not just apparent change in the liquid. Proof lay in the death of the fish and the resulting stench. Since we explained that what the magicians could do, was affect the water present, but not the water upstream that had not yet flowed to within the area subject to the magician's spell, the Egyptians would attempt to drink clear liquid if and when it arrived. In this case, however, there was no such relief. Hence the Torah reports that they would tire of waiting for clear water to follow the discolored liquid.²⁰

The Torah explains that **נֶפֶשׁ**, soul, acts in **עֲשִׂיהָ**, Assiya, the world of doing or making. We read

But the soul that *does* with a high hand, [whether] he be home-born or a stranger, the same blasphemeth the Lord. And that soul shall be cut off from among his people.²¹

Here the beginning Hebrew phrase is **וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה**. The word **תַּעֲשֶׂה** is the third person future of the root **עָשָׂה**, meaning to *do*, to *make*.

In another place we read:

For whoever shall *do* any of these abominations, even the souls that *do* them shall be cut off from among their people.²²

Here the phrase translated as “the souls that do them” in the Hebrew is **הַנֶּפְשׁוֹת הַעֹשֶׂת**. And we see that soul is again associated with doing.

Now the dominant Sefirah in the world of doing, **עֲשִׂיהָ**, is the Sefirah **מַלְכוּת**. From the Zohar, we learn that **נֶפֶשׁ**, soul, is associated with the Sefirah **מַלְכוּת**.

²⁰Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 282.

²¹Numbers 30:15.

²²Leviticus 18:29.

Observe that נִפְשׁ, רוּחַ, and נְשָׁמָה are an ascending series of grades. The lowest of them נִפְשׁ, has its source in the perennial celestial stream, but it cannot exist permanently save with the help of רוּחַ, which abides between fire and water. רוּחַ, in turn, is sustained by נְשָׁמָה, that higher grade above it, which is thus the source of both נִפְשׁ and רוּחַ. When רוּחַ receives its sustenance from נְשָׁמָה, then נִפְשׁ receives it in turn through רוּחַ, so that the three form a unity.²³

This tells us that נִפְשׁ is below רוּחַ on the tree and that רוּחַ is between fire and water. Now the left column is the column of fire and the right column is the column of water. And Sefer Yetzirah tells us that שׁ, fire, is above and מ, water, is below and א, air, is inbetween.²⁴ On the tree, שׁ is the letter that connects חֶכְמָה and בִּינָה; א is the letter that connects חֶסֶד and נְבוּרָה; and מ is the letter that connects נְצַח and הוֹד. These are the three horizontal paths on the tree. This places the center of רוּחַ at תְּפֹאֶרֶת. תְּפֹאֶרֶת is the representative of the six Sefirot חֶסֶד, נְבוּרָה, תְּפֹאֶרֶת, נְצַח, הוֹד, and יְסוּד. נִפְשׁ being below these six must then associate with מַלְכוּת.

And נִפְשׁ, soul, is associated with blood as we read:

But flesh with its *soul*, which is its blood, you shall not eat.²⁵

For the *soul* of the flesh is in the blood.²⁶

For the *soul* of all flesh is its blood, on which its life depends: therefore, I said to the children of Israel, you shall not eat the blood of any flesh: for the *soul* of all flesh is its blood.²⁷

But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; for the blood is the *soul*, and you must not consume the *soul* with the flesh.²⁸

In the story of Cain and Abel we read

²³ *The Zohar*, vol. 2, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 281.

²⁴ *Sefer Yetzirah*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), p. 274.

²⁵ Genesis 9:4.

²⁶ Leviticus 17:11.

²⁷ Leviticus 17:14.

²⁸ Deuteronomy 12:23.

After a period of time, Cain brought an offering to God of the fruit of the ground; and as for Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choices. God turned to Abel and to his offering, but to Cain and to his offering He did not turn. And this annoyed Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell.²⁹

Cain brings to God some of the produce of the ground. Abel brings the choicest of the firstlings, even before he has any benefit from them. The comparison between what Cain brings and what Abel brings suggests that what Cain brings is an inferior portion of the crop, the leftovers. Cain is greedy; he desires and takes the best for himself. And for God he donates the leavings. While Abel brings the best for God. This makes what Abel brings acceptable to God and what Cain brings not acceptable to God.

In order not to be faced with the unacceptability of his avariciousness, Cain kills Abel. Then God says to Cain:

What have you done? Hark, the *blood* of your brother cries out to Me from the ground.³⁰

Avariciousness and greediness are the principal vices of מְלָכוֹת. The avaricious deeds we do result in our blood, our נֶפֶשׁ, crying out to God.

The shephard associated with מְלָכוֹת is King David. Because King David was involved in wars and the spilling of much blood, God did not permit him to build the temple. God only permitted him to provide the situation and resources which facilitated his son Solomon to build the temple.

From all this we can understand how blood corresponds to מְלָכוֹת.

Frogs צַפְרָדַיִם

Thus says the Lord:

Let my people go, that they may serve me. And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs. And the river shall bring forth frogs in swarms. And these will go up and come into thy

²⁹Genesis 4:3-5.

³⁰Genesis 4:10.

*house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon they bed,
and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people,
and into thy ovens, and into thy kneading troughs. And
the frogs shall come up both on thee and on thy people,
and on all thy servants.*³¹

About the bedchamber, the Zohar tells us

The bed here is mentioned only in connection with Pharaoh, not with his servants and people. The reason is this. It is written concerning Sarah:

The princes of Pharaoh saw here and commended her before Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.³²

The threefold repetition of "Pharaoh" in this verse corresponds to the three Pharaohs, one in the time of Sarah, one in the time of Joseph, and one whom Moses punished with his rod. The first Pharaoh, seeing that Sarah was a beautiful woman, commanded his artists to make a likeness of her. They painted her picture on one of the walls of his bedchamber, but he was not satisfied until they made a picture of her on wood, which he took with him to bed. Each successive Pharaoh used similarly to feast his eyes on that picture. For that reason Pharaoh was punished more severely than his subjects; the frogs entering even into his bed.³³

Midrash Rabbah tells us that the frogs

destroyed their bodies and emasculated them.³⁴

For this is the interpretation of

And frogs, which destroyed them.³⁵

³¹Exodus 7:26-29.

³²Genesis 12:15.

³³*The Zohar*, vol. 2, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 98.

³⁴*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 200.

³⁵Psalms 78:45.

Why did He visit them with frogs? Because the Egyptians, when subjecting Israel to slavery, ordered them to bring reptiles and creeping things; in retaliation did He bring frogs upon them. Whenever they used to fill a cup, it was found to be full of frogs.³⁶

Rabbi Alshech explains that

By announcing that the frogs would smite all within the borders of Egypt, God wanted to show that precisely the area subject to the horoscope governing Egypt would be struck, not a square yard more or less. These frogs, i.e. the ability to multiply were the known frogs, *Batzefardim*, which would swarm completely out of control in their numbers from their normal habitat, the Nile. They would occupy all sources of water pond etc. These were not intelligent frogs. The Nile, however, would spawn in quantity another species of frogs, which were intelligent and which would invade the centers of civilization, homes, even the bed of Pharaoh. Their specific objective would be to frustrate the Egyptians' family life. Afterwards, they would interfere with another aspect of life on this earth, namely the economy, food supplies. Therefore they would invade the kitchens, ovens, kneading bowls etc, consuming all in their path. By persecuting the Egyptians to the point of where they would be fed up with their very lives if the plague were not removed, these frogs also showed that God who had sent them, had decisive influence on life on earth itself. The Midrash explains that these intelligent frogs committed many acts that were against all instincts of survival and self preservation, in order to carry out the design of their Creator, and produce a feeling of abhorrence amongst their victims. These frogs survived in the most unlikely situations, such as in burning ovens, human intestines etc. They only died after they had demonstrated their ability to survive in the places in which they should have died immediately. They left all those places that were natural deathtraps for them alive and died away from the houses and the field.³⁷

³⁶*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 134.

³⁷Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), pp. 284-285.

The word frogs **צְפִרְדָּעִים** can be broken into **נְעִים**, which is the plural of the noun **נֶעַ**, meaning knowledge or understanding and the root **פָּרַץ**, which means to *break, break through, break out, erupt, demolish, destroy, make a breach, crack, scatter, rush upon, burst, spread, increase, or overflow*.

When Jacob leaves Beersheva and was on his way to Haran, God talks to Jacob using a word whose root is **פָּרַץ**.

The land on which thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt *spread abroad* to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.³⁸

Using the verb **פָּרַץ**, Jacob says to Laban:

For the little which thou hadst before I came is now *increased* to a multitude; and the Lord has blessed thee since my coming.³⁹

Supporting this meaning of spread and increase is:

The house of their father *increased* greatly.⁴⁰

His substance is *increased* in the land.⁴¹

So we can understand that relative to knowledge, frogs is symbolic of the knowledge that facilitates a breaking out or a breaking through which is concomitant with a spreading or increase. And this breaking through and increasing brings blessing.

The feelings of **חֶסֶד** and **נְבוּנָה**, their balance in **הַפְּאָרָת**, and the determination to manifest or express these feelings in **נְצַח** and **הוֹד**, leads to a carefully thought out plan of action. This connection between the feelings which give rise to the carefully considered plan and the action takes place through **יְסוּד**. We can also understand that foundation, **יְסוּד**, functions as a connection in that the foundation of a building binds and connects the building to the earth. This is related to

³⁸Genesis 28:13-14.

³⁹Genesis 30:30.

⁴⁰1 Chronicles 4:38.

⁴¹Job 1:10.

He founded the earth on its base.⁴²

Here *base* is a form of the word **מְבוּן**. Rabbi Kaplan teaches that

The word **מְבוּן** comes from the root **הִבִּין**, meaning to *prepare*. Hence **מְבוּן** refers not merely to a physical base, but to one that is specifically prepared for a special purpose. ... [The scriptural verse] indicates that everything in the physical world has a specific spiritual counterpart and basis, through which it can be elevated.⁴³

Earth is the place of action. **מְבוּן**, *base, place, or dwelling*, is the place of God as manifested in **יְסוּד**.⁴⁴ For **מְבוּן** is the name of the sixth heaven and **יְסוּד** is the sixth Sefirah from **חֵדֶר**.

From this we understand that it is this carefully considered and thought out plan of **יְסוּד** that permits the breaking through of these feelings in an expression. The expression is the action that we take.

When from our laziness, a principal vice of **יְסוּד**, our expression stays inside us, we do not break through and connect to **מְלָכוּת**.

So frogs are related to **יְסוּד** through the root **פָּרַץ**, which means to *break through* or *increase*. But this is not all, for frogs are known to lay up to 20,000 eggs at a time. This enables them to reproduce themselves at an exceedingly rapid rate, conditions permitting. Reproduction occurs through the agency of sex. This relates to the shepherd Joseph who is associated with **יְסוּד**. Recall that Joseph is the one who is sexually pure. He repulsed the persistent sexual advances made to him by Potiphar's wife. The Zohar tells us that

Joseph, who by reason of his having observed the covenant, is known as "Joseph the righteous."⁴⁵

And about the righteous one, Proverbs tells us:

⁴²Psalms 104:5.

⁴³*Sefer Yetzirah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, trans. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), p. 42.

⁴⁴Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), p. 43.

⁴⁵*The Zohar*, vol. 1, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 192.

The righteous one is the foundation of the world.⁴⁶

The word יסוד means foundation. יסוד is the Sefirah immediately above מלכות in the central column of the Tree of Life.

Lice כְּנִיִּם

And the Lord said to Moses:

*Say to Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may turn into lice throughout all the land of Egypt.*⁴⁷

We read in Midrash Rabbah:⁴⁸

Why did He bring gnats [lice] upon them? Because they made Israel the scavengers of their streets; on this account did their dust become gnats [lice], so that when they dug, cubit by cubit, there was no earth there, as it says

*All the dust of the earth became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.*⁴⁹

Rabbi Alshech says that

Since Aaron also used his hand, the bodies developed insects independently, i.e. the insects came into being on man and beast. Also the dust of the earth sprouted insects in the entire land of Egypt. The *chartumim* thought they might have a chance against the insects that had originated in the earth, the כְּנִיִּם (plural); they tried with their usual method, creating illusions, but failed. Concerning the insects on man and beast however, they did not even try.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Proverbs 10:25.

⁴⁷Exodus 8:12.

⁴⁸*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 136.

⁴⁹Exodus 8:13.

⁵⁰Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 288.

The word **כְּנִיִּם** is a plural form for the word **כֵּן**, which as a noun means a *louse* or *flea*. But it has another meaning as *yes, rightly, or honestly*. And as an adjective it means *sincere, frank, outspoken, candid, true, honest, right, or earnest*. When Joseph talks to his brothers the first time they came to Egypt to buy food, he recognizes them and says using the plural **כְּנִיִּם** of the word **כֵּן**:

You are spies: to see the nakedness of the land are you come. And they said to him, No, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man's sons; we are *true* men, thy servants are no spies.⁵¹

Then Joseph says to them:

If you are *true* men, let one of your brothers be bound in the house of your confinement.⁵²

Finally, when the brothers return to their father Jacob they tell him:

The man, who is the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. And we said to him, We are *true* men; we are no spies. We are twelve brothers sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. And the man, the lord of the country, said to us: Hereby shall I know that you are *true* men: leave one of your bretheren here with me and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone: and bring your youngest brother to me. Then shall I know that you are no spies, but that you are *true* men.⁵³

As a noun **כֵּן** also means *base, pedestal, mount, stand or bracket*. And cognate to this meaning is the noun **כִּנָּה** meaning *base, stand, easel, or mounting*. And as well **כִּנָּה** means *ruler* used for drawing straight lines. The root **כנה** means to *name*.

The left column of the Tree of Life headed by the Sefirah **בִּינָה**, is the Sefirah for Analytic Understanding and logical reasoning. This is the sphere of

⁵¹Genesis 42:9-11.

⁵²Genesis 42:19.

⁵³Genesis 42:31-34.

comprehending everything in its place. It is the sphere of giving names. Under **בִּינָה** is the Sefirah of **גְּבוּרָה**, strength. Strength provides a base, a stand. Strength is a ruler. Its lines are straight and disciplined. And under the Sefirah **גְּבוּרָה** is the Sefirah **הוֹד**, the Sefirah related to communication. Its virtue is honesty. Its vice is deceit. When that which is named and understood is discussed with discipline, what manifests is honesty and candidness.

To communicate with honesty and candidness in a disciplined discussion, involves speaking words. The Hebrew root for *speaking* is **דבר**. Interestingly enough there are exactly ten times that Aaron and the root **דבר** are associated in parashot **וארא** and **שמות**, the first sections that discusses the plagues. God speaks to Moses concerning Aaron.

*I know that he can speak well (דָּבַר יְדַבֵּר).*⁵⁴

*And thou shalt speak (וְדַבַּרְתָּ) unto him and thou shall put the words (הַדְּבָרִים) in his mouth.*⁵⁵

*And he shall speak (וְדַבֵּר) for thee.*⁵⁶

*And Moses told Aaron all the words (דְּבָרֵי) of the Lord who had sent him.*⁵⁷

*And Aaron spoke (וַיְדַבֵּר) all the words (הַדְּבָרִים) which the Lord had spoken (דִּבֶּר) to Moses.*⁵⁸

*And Aaron thy brother shall speak (יְדַבֵּר) unto the Pharaoh that he let the children of Israel go out of his land.*⁵⁹

From this it is no surprise to learn that Aaron is the shephard of **הוֹד**.

Wild Beasts עֲרֵב

Thus says the Lord:

⁵⁴Exodus 4:14.

⁵⁵Exodus 4:15.

⁵⁶Exodus 4:16.

⁵⁷Exodus 4:28.

⁵⁸Exodus 4:30.

⁵⁹Exodus 7:2.

*Let my people go, that they may serve me. Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send wild beasts upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses. And the houses of Egypt shall be full of swarms of wild beasts and also the ground on which they are.*⁶⁰

We read in Midrash Rabbah:

Why did He bring swarms [of wild beasts] upon them? Because they used to say to the Israelites:

Go, and bring unto us bears, lions, and leopards

in order to vex them.

To vex them here means that the Egyptians would put an Israelite and a wild beast in a public arena and made the Israelite fight the wild beast as a public spectacle, just as happened in the time after the fall of the Jewish State.

Rabbi Alshech says that this plague

is directed first and foremost at Pharaoh himself. Therefore God stresses 1) *against you* 2) *against your servants* 3) *against your people*. The soil needs the lesson least, therefore is mentioned last. Since God had to override the *mazzalot*, celestial force of the beasts which is located in celestial regions, Moses and Aaron whose power extended only in the lower world, could not be the ones who set this plague in motion. In case Pharaoh would say that he had no proof that these phenomena emanated from God, Moses listed the order in which these manifestations would occur as proof; this is especially so, since the order is precisely the reverse of what would have taken place had the animal invasion been caused by natural, physical causes.⁶¹

⁶⁰Exodus 8: 17.

⁶¹Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 289.

The root **עֵרַב** has five meanings: to *be dark, grow dark, become evening, be obscured, or become gloomy*; to *guarantee, stand surety, or pledge*; to *mix or confuse*; to *be agreeable, pleasant, or sweet*; and to *trade, barter, negotiate, or deal*.

The Zohar tells us

Then there came upon them the plague called **עֵרַב** (lit. mixture, i.e. mixture of various beasts) which allegorically indicates that the Almighty confounded their magical arts so that their practitioners were not able to piece them together. Moreover, that confusion produced a mingling of a perverse and hybrid kind similar to those referred to in the words of Scripture,

thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed;
neither shall there come upon thee a garment of two
kinds of stuff mingled together.⁶²

Many were then the legions that bestirred themselves above, but the Holy One, blessed be He, confounded them altogether; these mighty deeds which the Almighty performed in Egypt were accomplished by the raising of one of his hands against them, both on high and below. It was then that the wisdom of Egypt perished, as Scripture says:

and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the
understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.⁶³

Note further the pronouncement:

And I will confuse Egypt with Egypt.⁶⁴

that is to say, celestial Egypt with terrestrial Egypt. For the celestial legions are in charge of the terrestrial ones, and they both were altogether thrown in disorder. They were confused on high so that the Egyptians could not derive inspiration from the celestial sources as formerly. It was with this object that

⁶²Leviticus 19:19.

⁶³Isaiah 29:14.

⁶⁴Isaiah 29:1.

the Almighty brought on the עָרֹב, or mixture and confusion, manifested in a mixed horde of beasts that assailed them.⁶⁵

Rashi comments that עָרֹב is to be interpreted as all species of evil beasts and serpents and scorpions in a mixture.⁶⁶

Sforno says that “also the ground on which they are” means

The very ground on which the houses (of the Egyptians) stood would teem with serpents and other creatures which breed in the deep earth, in such a manner that they will not feel secure at night even in a locked house.⁶⁷

The word עָרֹב is related to the word עֲרֹב, which occurs in the phrase עֲרֹב רַב, *mixed multitude*.

*And a mixed multitude went up also with them.*⁶⁸

Rashi explains that this means a mixture of nations of sojourners.⁶⁹ Cassuto explains that this was a motely mob who were not of Israelite origin.⁷⁰ The Zohar tells us that

The *mixed multitude* consisted entirely of one people all the members of which spoke one language: namely, all the sorcerers of Egypt and all its magicians.⁷¹

The Zohar tells us that Moses, the shephard associated with נִצְחָה, specifically allowed the mixed multitude to leave Egypt with the Israelites, permitting them to opportunistically convert and participate in the Exodus.

⁶⁵ *The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 3, (II, 30b), (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 99.

⁶⁶ Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Exodus*, vol. 2, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Exodus 8:17, p. 72.

⁶⁷ Ovadiah Sforno, *Sforno: Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987), p. 285.

⁶⁸ Exodus 12:38.

⁶⁹ Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Exodus*, vol. 2, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Exodus 12:38, p. 119.

⁷⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987), p. 147.

⁷¹ *The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 4, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 144.

When they [the *mixed multitude*] beheld the signs and the wonder which Moses wrought in Egypt they came to Moses to be converted. Said the Holy One to Moses:

Do not receive them!

Moses, however, replied:

Sovereign of the universe, now that they have seen Thy power they desire to accept our Faith, let them see Thy power every day and they will learn that there is no God like unto Thee.

And Moses accepted them. And why, then, were they called “mixed multitude”? Because they consisted of all the grades of the Egyptian magicians.⁷²

It was of this mixed multitude that we read

The people gathered themselves unto Aaron, and said to him,

*Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this man Moses, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.*⁷³

Then the Zohar tells us that at the incident of the molten calf, the mixed multitude:⁷⁴

was not sincere, and therefore they caused him [Moses] to be degraded as it is written,

Go, get thee down, for thy people (i.e. thy proselytes) which thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have become corrupt: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have

⁷²*The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 4, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 144.

⁷³Exodus 32:1

⁷⁴*The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 1, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, pp. 98-99.

*made them a molten calf and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed to it.*⁷⁵

When the golden (molten) calf was cast into the fire of the furnace, Rashi tells us that there came the magicians of the mixed multitude who had come up with them from Egypt and they made it by magic.⁷⁶ It is this mixed multitude of whom we read:

*And they rose up on the morrow and they offered burnt offerings and they brought peace offerings and the people sat down to eat and drink and they rose up to make merry.*⁷⁷

Rashi explains that to make merry here means incest and uncovering of nakedness.⁷⁸ Hirsch explains that this was an unchaining of sensuality.⁷⁹

This is reinforced by

*And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting.*⁸⁰

Here, the phrase *and the mixed multitude* is the translation of the word **וְהָאֶסְפָּרָה**, which Rashi tells us is **עֵרֵב רֵב**.⁸¹

And it is reinforced by

He brought upon them the plague of mixture of wild beasts because of their promiscuity, one man lying with ten women and ten men with one woman; for this reason did He smite them with a motely crowd.⁸²

⁷⁵Exodus 32:7-8.

⁷⁶Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Exodus*, vol. 2, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Exodus 32:4, p. 402.

⁷⁷Exodus 32:6

⁷⁸Rashi p. 403.

⁷⁹Hirsch, p. 609.

⁸⁰Numbers 11:4.

⁸¹Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Numbers*, vol. 4, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Numbers 11:4, p. 104.

⁸²*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 200.

Also note the parallel between **אספסוף** and **ערברב**. Sefer Yetzirah teaches that **א** and **ע** are among the guttural letters formed in the throat; **ס** and **ר** are sibilants produced by expelling air between the teeth with the tongue held flat; **פ** and **ב** are both labial letters primarily formed by closing the lips.⁸³

The first time **ערב** is used it occurs in the form **הערב**, *the mixture of wild beasts*.⁸⁴ Now if these letters are rearranged and the **ר** filled out as **רו**, there results **בערוה**, meaning *in nakedness, incest, shame, lewdness, unchastity, or foul thing*. Lewdness and lust are among the principal vices of **נצה**.

This association with lewdness is reinforced by the prophet Ezekiel, who uses the word **ערבת** coming from the root **ערב**.

Therefore, behold I gather all your lovers with whom you *mingled* [to whom you were *pleasant*] and all whom you loved with all whom you hated and I shall gather them against you from around and I shall expose your nakedness to them and they will see all your nakedness. And I shall judge you with the judgments of adulteresses and murderesses, and I shall deliver you into their hands.⁸⁵

The shephard of **נצה** is Moses. Moses is the one having total certainty, faith, and devotion to God. Even when Moses did not have sufficient information on the intellectual level that God will be making miracles to help the Israelites, he was devoted and had complete faith. When the Israelites had just left Egypt and came to the Sea of Reeds and Pharaoh with his horsemen caught up to them, the Israelites were afraid. And they asked Moses:

Is it not better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness? But Moses said to the people

*Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!*⁸⁶

⁸³Sefer Yetzirah, trans. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), p. 102.

⁸⁴Exodus 8:17.

⁸⁵Ezekiel 16:37-38.

⁸⁶Exodus 14:12-14.

When the Israelites came to the hill country of the Amorites and the people wanted to send spies to explore the land and the report came back that the people of the land were strong and tall Moses said:

Have no dread or fear of them. None other than the Lord your God, who goes before you will fight for you, just as He did for you in Egypt before your very eyes, and in the wilderness, where you saw how the Lord your God carried you as a man carries his son all the distance that you traveled until you came to this place.⁸⁷

Before Moses dies and Joshua leads the Israelites into the land to be given to the Israelites, Moses says to Joshua:

You have seen with your own eyes all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so shall the Lord do to all the kingdoms into which you shall cross over. Do not fear them, for it is the Lord your God who will battle for you.

The faithfulness and devotion lived by Moses is clear from these passages. Faithfulness and devotion is one of the principal virtues of נְצִיחַ.

Pestilence דָּבָר

Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews:

*Let my people go, that they may serve me. For if thou refuse to let them go and wilt hold them still, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous pestilence.*⁸⁸

The Zohar explains that

⁸⁷Deuteronomy 1:29-31.

⁸⁸Exodus 9:1-3.

here it speaks of “the hand of the Lord,” to wit, with all its five fingers, for the reason that five species of cattle were smitten, as enumerated in the passage,

*upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep.*⁸⁹

They were smitten each one by one of the five fingers, and thus together by the hand of the Lord. Hence we read, “a very grievous murrain,” signifying that the cattle died of themselves, suddenly and without any visible cause.⁹⁰

The word **דָּבַר**, pestilence, has many cognates. The root **דָּבַר** means to *destroy*. The noun **דָּבָר** means *leader* or *guide*. The root **דָּבַר** means to *say* or *speak*. The noun **דָּבָר** means *thing, matter, affair, something, anything, word, speech, news, saying, message, or command*.

We read in Psalms:

בְּדָבַר יְיָ הַיָּיִה שָׁמַיִם נִעֲשׂוּ

By the *word* of the Lord was heaven made⁹¹

שָׁמַיִם, heaven, is a code word for the Sefirah **הַתְּפָאֶרֶת** as we read in the Zohar.

Heaven, **שָׁמַיִם**, symbolizes Beauty, **הַתְּפָאֶרֶת**.⁹²

The Zohar says on the verse:

Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together
unto one place⁹³

that is, let the grades beneath the heaven be unified in it so as
to form one whole, perfect in all the six directions.⁹⁴

⁸⁹Exodus 9:3.

⁹⁰*The Zohar*, vol. 3, (II, 31b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), pp. 101-102.

⁹¹Psalms 33:6.

⁹²*The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 4, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 110.

⁹³Genesis 1:9.

⁹⁴*The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 1, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 51.

The six directions refer to the six Sefirot **הַסֵּדֶר**, **נְבוּרָה**, **הַפְּאֵרֶת**, **נִצְח**, **הוֹד**, and **יְסוּד** of which **הַפְּאֵרֶת** is the central representative. The vice of the Sefirah **הַפְּאֵרֶת** is pride or arrogance. Pride and arrogance destroy Godliness. How is arrogance, conceit, and haughtiness expressed? It is expressed with speech, through our words. And it is expressed by not listening to the words that other's speak.

It is this arrogance of Pharaoh which we can associate with his hardened heart, for the passages which discuss Pharaoh's hardened heart use the word **דִּבֶּר**, the third person masculine past tense of the root **דָּבַר**, to speak.

*And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, that he did not hearken to them as the Lord had spoken.*⁹⁵

*And the magicians of Pharaoh did so with their secret arts. And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken to them as the Lord had spoken.*⁹⁶

*But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not to them as the Lord had spoken.*⁹⁷

Then the magicians said to Pharaoh:

This is the finger of God.

*And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not to them as the Lord had spoken.*⁹⁸

*And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he hearkened not to them as the Lord had spoken to Moses.*⁹⁹

*And the heart of Pharaoh was hard, neither would he let the children of Israel go as the Lord had spoken to Moses.*¹⁰⁰

דָּבַר, pestilence, destroys just as pride and arrogance destroys. The plague of pestilence, **דָּבַר**, destroys the pride of Egypt: its horses.

⁹⁵Exodus 7:13.

⁹⁶Exodus 7:22.

⁹⁷Exodus 8:11.

⁹⁸Exodus 8:15.

⁹⁹Exodus 9:12.

¹⁰⁰Exodus 9:35.

The principal virtue of תְּפִאֲרֶת is humility. One way in which we manifest humility is by listening and doing what God tells us to do. This is what the children of Israel said:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹר יְיָ הִינוּ נַעֲשֶׂה
*All that the Lord has spoken we will do.*¹⁰¹

דְּבַר אֲתָה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה
*Speak with us and we will hear.*¹⁰²

כָּל דְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹר יְיָ הִינוּ נַעֲשֶׂה
*All the words which the Lord has spoken will we do.*¹⁰³

כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֹר יְיָ הִינוּ נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָעָה
*All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey.*¹⁰⁴

The shephard of תְּפִאֲרֶת is the patriarch Jacob. Rabbi Simeon of the Zohar explains.

*And the middle bar in the midst of the boards shall pass from one end to the other.*¹⁰⁵

“The middle bar,” he said, signifies Jacob, the perfect saint, as we have pointed out on another occasion in connection with the characterization of Jacob as

*A complete man, dwelling in tents.*¹⁰⁶

It does not say, “dwelling in a tent,” but “dwelling in tents,” which denotes that he unified the two “tents” (of Severity and Mercy). The same implication may be found here:

The middle bar in the midst of the boards shall pass from one end to the other

¹⁰¹Exodus 19:8.

¹⁰²Exodus 20:16.

¹⁰³Exodus 24:3.

¹⁰⁴Exodus 24:7.

¹⁰⁵Exodus 26:28.

¹⁰⁶Genesis 25:27.

uniting them. Jacob was perfect in regard to both sides, the Holy Ancient and the Microprosopus, and also to the supernal Grace and the supernal Power, harmonizing the two. ...

I perceive that Wisdom, (חֵכֶמֶת) is the totality of all the holy Sefiroth, and that supernal Grace (חֶסֶד) emanates from Wisdom, and Power (גְבוּרָה), which is the prompter of severe judgement, from Understanding (בִּינָה). Jacob harmonized both sides.¹⁰⁷

This is also what Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla teaches.

Jacob is the essence of the central attribute; just as the center leaf of the date palm belongs to both sides of the palm, so Jacob belongs to both tents which are the tent of Abraham, which is compassion, and the tent of Isaac, which is judgement. And this is the essence of the verse:

*And Jacob was a simple man who dwelled in tents.*¹⁰⁸

For why did the verse have to mention that he dwelled in tents? It could have said “he dwelled in a tent.” It comes to teach that the attribute of Jacob stands between the two tents and it affixes itself to the right and left through the middle attribute until one finds Abraham and Isaac latched on to Jacob. Abraham to the right of Jacob and Isaac to the left.¹⁰⁹

It is Jacob of whom it is said:

Give truth to Jacob.¹¹⁰

And how is truth expressed if not through words, דְבָרִים?

The Sefirah תְּפִאֲרֶת represents the heart of the six Sefirot גְבוּרָה, חֶסֶד, תְּפִאֲרֶת, הוֹר, נֶצַח, תְּפִאֲרֶת, יְסוֹד. These six are called שָׁמַיִם, heaven.

¹⁰⁷ *The Zohar* trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff vol. 4, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 108.

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 25:27.

¹⁰⁹ Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla, *Gates of Light*, trans. Avi Weinstein, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), p. 209.

¹¹⁰ *Micah* 7:20.

With a beginning, God created *the heaven* and the earth.¹¹¹

And the earth was without form and void;
And darkness was on the face of the deep.¹¹²

From the position of heaven we next read:

And the spirit (רוּחַ) of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.¹¹³

Here the *surface of the waters* parallels *And darkness was on the face of the deep*. And *face of the deep* parallels earth. And earth is מְלִכּוּת. So *spirit of God hovering over the surface of the waters* means that spirit was above, in heaven and hovering over earth. Spirit, רוּחַ, is the next higher dimension of soul. For all the occurrences of רוּחַ which occur in the Pentateuch, the only direct association of רוּחַ with a biblical character is with Jacob.

And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the *spirit of Jacob* their father revived.¹¹⁴

Boils נִשְׂתֵּי

God spoke to Moses and Aaron:

*Take ye your hands full of soot out of a furnace, and let Moses throw it towards the heaven before the eyes of Pharaoh, and it shall become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and in the whole land of Egypt it shall become an inflammatory rash breaking out into boils on man and beast.*¹¹⁵

We read in Midrash Rabbah:

¹¹¹Genesis 1:1.

¹¹²Genesis 1:2.

¹¹³Genesis 1:3.

¹¹⁴Genesis 45:27.

¹¹⁵Exodus 9:8-9.

Why did He bring boils upon them? Because they had appointed the Israelites to heat warm things for them and keep cool the things that were cold; on this account were they smitten with boils so that they should not be able to touch their bodies. [So that their bodies could not stand either hot or cold.]¹¹⁶

Rabbi Alshech tells us that

By commanding Moses to throw the soot into the celestial spheres, God wanted to make Moses a participant in overcoming the powers of magic in the heavens, i.e. enable him to overcome a purely spiritual force. Since Moses had been manipulating the element fire, an element used both in the material and the spiritual sense, this was appropriate. Moses having also demonstrated power over wind previously, was able to prevent the soot from being dispersed by the wind, and ascend to heaven without hindrance.¹¹⁷

The word שְׁחִיָּן means boils. It is related to the root שָׁחַן meaning to *be hot* or to *be overheated*. This is the root of the word used in

The King's servant is a king; cleave to heat and it will warm you.¹¹⁸

And there is the related noun שְׁחִיָּין, *swimmer*. It must be from this that the Talmud infers that the boils were wet on the outside and dry on the inside. For we read:¹¹⁹

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said:

The boils brought upon the Egyptians by the Holy One, blessed be He, were moist within but dry without, as it says

¹¹⁶ *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 141.

¹¹⁷ Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 292.

¹¹⁸ *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis, vol. 1, trans. Rabbi H. Freedman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 127.

¹¹⁹ *The Soncino Talmud, Seder Nezikin* vol. 1, Bava Kamma, trans. E. W. Kirzner (London, The Soncino Press, 1935), p. 458.

*And it became a boil breaking forth (אבעכעת) with blains upon man and upon beast.*¹²⁰

Rabbi Hirsch explains that

שְׁחִין occurs again in the Torah amongst the ננעי צרעת and we know from the Gemora that in relation to מכה it is a wound similar to a burn, but not caused by fire, but by a knock, blow or pressure etc., i.e. inflammation. שְׁחִין in Chaldean means generally *to be hot*, שנה שחונה a hot year. שְׁחִין is accordingly an inflammatory condition which can develop and for boils, where pus forms which wants to force its way out, – אבעכעת from בעה, wanting to get out. If שְׁחִין is such an inflammation which ends up in pus, necroses and ultimate gangrene (the מוכה שְׁחִין ultimately loses limbs and members through gangrene) it is clear why soot was taking to induce it. There is nothing which, by its nature works so much against inflammation, gangrene and foulness, as charcoal, tar, creosote, and their derivatives, all materials related to, and even derived from soot. It is quite probable that soot was the recognised remedy for שְׁחִין. Here, just that, was to induce it.¹²¹

The Ramban explains:

According to the opinion of our Rabbis, [the small quantity of] soot [in the hands of Moses] became the dust which settled over the whole land of Egypt, and that dust, *coming upon man and upon beast*, caused them to break forth with boils and blains *throughout all the land of Egypt*, since it was a burning hot dust. Perhaps the wind caused the dust to enter the homes as well, and there was thus no escape from it. This is a correct [conjecture]. Many times during a drought, the fall of the dew is accompanied by a sort of dust, and it is furthermore written.

The Eternal will make the rain of thy land powder and dust.¹²²

¹²⁰Exodus 9:9.

¹²¹Rabbi Samuel Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 2, Exodus, trans. Isaac Levy, (Gateshead, Judaica Press, 1989), p. 99.

¹²²Deuteronomy 28:24.

It is also possible to say, in line with the plain meaning of Scripture, that the purport of the expression, *And it shall become fine dust* is that the dust which will be produced in that place from the soot will bring boils *over all the land of Egypt*, as He infected the air to do so, it being a decree of the Supreme One.¹²³

Cassuto tells us:

The furnace is a factory where work is done by means of fire, and *inter alia* it is a kiln for burning bricks. Although prior to the Roman period, the Egyptians used mainly sun-dried bricks (adobe), yet the making of fired bricks was also practised by them. Particularly in buildings of the nineteenth dynasty – to which Ramsee II, the pharaoh of the oppression belonged – and also of the twentieth dynasty, fire-baked bricks have often been found. Now it was stated earlier that brick-making was one of the severe tasks imposed upon the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 1:4), even constituting their primary work (Exodus 5:7-9) and apparently the two things – the labour and the plague – were interconnected. The smoke of the kiln is quickly dispersed in the air; and sooner or later the bricks are taken outside the factory; but the soot continues to cling to the walls of the kiln, at once an indicator and a symbol of the hard work of the toilers. Hence it was in accord with poetic justice that the soot, which had been created, as it were, by the sweat of the enslaved people should inflict punishment on the bodies of the enslavers.¹²⁴

Besides being a plague on Egypt, שִׁחִי, boils, is also part of the curses on the Israelites. Moses explains to the Israelites that if the Israelites follow the commandments God will provide blessings on the Israelites and if the Israelites do not follow the commandments, then God will bring on curses to the Israelites.

The Lord will afflict you with the *boils* of Egypt, haemorrhoids,

¹²³Nachmanides, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, Exodus, trans. Rabbi Charles Chavel, (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), p. 94.

¹²⁴Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1987), pp. 112-113.

[tumors], and with scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed.¹²⁵

Rashi, following the Talmud, comments on this verse that the boils would be very severe inflammations that were moist on the inside and dry on the outside. He says the scab should be interpreted as a festering boil. And the itch should be interpreted as a boil that is dry like a potsherd.¹²⁶

The Lord will afflict you with severe boils in the knees and in the legs whereof thou canst not be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the crown of thy head.¹²⁷

The verb *afflict* used in each of these verses is יִכָּה, from the root נִכָּה, which means to *afflict, smite, strike, hurt, wound*. The word יִכָּה occurs exactly four times in the Pentateuch. The other two times are also part of the curses:

The Lord shall afflict thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish.¹²⁸

The Lord shall afflict thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.¹²⁹

Kabbalistically, this action to afflict or to smite is a pushing away, a withdrawing, and so is associated with the left column of the Tree. To deliberately strike or hurt is an action that people take when they are angry. Anger is the principal vice of גְבוּרָה. These last two verses tell us that the anger is hot for we have an associated fever, inflammation, and extreme burning. The disease is very hot. Rashi tells us that the consumption causes the wasting away and swelling of the flesh. The fever is very hot. The inflammation is a heat more

¹²⁵Deuteronomy 28:27.

¹²⁶Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Deuteronomy*, vol. 5, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Deuteronomy 28:27, pp. 249-250.

¹²⁷Deuteronomy 28:35.

¹²⁸Deuteronomy 28:22.

¹²⁹Deuteronomy 28:28.

intense than a fever. There is a continual thirsting for water. The reference to the sword is a reference to armies coming against the Israelites.¹³⁰ The Zohar associates the Sefirah נְבוֹרָה with “a burning fire.”¹³¹

The reference to mildew can be associated with the wetness of the boils on the inside. The anger here is so hot that it is a mad anger, a blind anger, an anger that is an astonishment of heart, which Rashi interprets to mean an obstruction of the heart.

The shephard of נְבוֹרָה is the patriarch Isaac. The Zohar tells us that

as soon as Abraham was circumcised, there issued from him Isaac, who was the holy seed and who was attached to the supernal spheres as symbolizing fire from water.¹³²

So the patriarch Isaac is associated with fire, the fire that came from Abraham who is associated as water.

When Jacob and his family leave Laban and Laban pursues them and catches up to them and just before they agree to make a covenant, the patriarch Jacob says:

Were it not that the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely you would have sent me away empty-handed.¹³³

From this we learn that fear is associated with Isaac.

The Zohar in sketching out the lower seven sephirot, which it calls palaces, says

The first palace is the palace of love; the second of fear; the third of mercy; the fourth, of prophecy through the clear mirror; the fifth, of prophecy through the hazy mirror; the sixth, of righteousness; the seventh, of justice.¹³⁴

¹³⁰Rashi, *Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, Deuteronomy*, vol. 5, trans. Abraham ben Isaiah and Benjamin Sharfman (Brooklyn, NY: S. S. and R. Publishing, 1976), Deuteronomy 28:22, p. 247.

¹³¹*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 97.

¹³²*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 350.

¹³³Genesis 31:42.

¹³⁴*The Zohar*, vol. 1, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 97.

Thus fear is associated with the second of the seven lower Sefirot. This is **גְבוּרָה**.

The left column of the Tree of Life is the column of fire. The root of **שְׁחִין** is **שָׁחַן**, which means to be hot. So it all fits together. **שָׁחַן**, boils, is associated with **גְבוּרָה**.

Hail **בָּרָד**

And the Lord said to Moses,

Stretch out thy hand towards heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, on man and beast, and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.

*And Moses stretched out his rod towards heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran down onto the earth; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flaring up amidst the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.*¹³⁵

We read in Midrash Rabbah:

Why did He bring hail upon them? Because they had made the Israelites planters of their vineyards, gardens, orchards, and trees; on this account did He bring upon them hail which destroyed all these plantations.¹³⁶

The Zohar tells us that since

¹³⁵Exodus 9:22-25.

¹³⁶*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 146.

the Egyptians did not repent the **דָּבָר** (murrain) literally turned about its letters and became **בָּרָד** (hail), which killed all those that survived¹³⁷

the **דָּבָר**, the pestilence.

Rabbi Hirsch notes that

God had only announced hail, but thunder and lightning and hail come. This may confirm the assumption that hail, as atmospheric condensation generally, is accompanied by electrical discharge either as cause or result. God did not simply let hail come, not just that hailstones fell, that would not have indicated necessarily a change in the atmospheric conditions of the land. But God made the hail develop over Egypt in the same way that it forms and falls in other countries, and indeed, in tremendous quantities, in a land that had hitherto never seen a hailstone. This threatened a complete change in the whole climatic character of the country.¹³⁸

Rabbi Alshech explains that

Although Moses was ordered merely to extend his hand heavens, (verse 22) we see that he used his staff (verse 23). Possibly, God meant to tell him that even his hand would be quite sufficient, the staff not being required; however, due to Moses' humility, he did not want to convey the impression that he alone, unassisted by the **אֵל־לְהִיִּם מִטָּה**, staff of God, could produce such an effect. (Although later at the sea, he extended his hand without the staff.) This may explain why he was told to produce only hail. Since he employed the staff however, the hail turned out to be a concoction of ice and fire that did not act in conflict with one another. The ice did not extinguish the fire, nor did the fire melt the ice. This is the meaning of **וַיְהִי בָרָד**, i.e. the hail remained hail, despite the fire inside it. God wanted to demonstrate that this hail was not a natural phenomenon, that distinguished itself merely by its exceptional severity and widespread occurrence.

¹³⁷ *The Zohar*, vol. 2, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 102.

¹³⁸ Rabbi Samuel Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 2, Exodus, trans. Isaac Levy, (Gateshead, Judaica Press, 1989), p. 103.

This is why Moses had to point toward the sky. The fire streaming from the skies, prior to the hail descending, should have heated the atmosphere and made the very occurrence of hail impossible. God used the fire to drive home the point that the origin of this hail could not be explained by applying the laws of physics.¹³⁹

Sforno¹⁴⁰ explains that fire ran down onto the earth means that

the enflamed air came down to the earth through the forceful thrust (lit. ‘movement’) of the hail which pressed upon it as it descended.

and fire flaring up amidst the hail means that

the forceful thrust of the hail enflamed the atmosphere, causing thunder. The forceful movement was so great (intense) that it damaged the soft (pliable) as well as the hard (growth) as it says

*and the hail smote every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field.*¹⁴¹

The plague of hail is the seventh plague. It is the only plague in which Pharaoh is told that he can do something to limit the damage the plague will do. He is told to bring his cattle to shelter.

*Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down, and they shall die.*¹⁴²

So this plague has the severity of a killing hail. But it also has the aspect of the mercy of Lovingkindness, the Sefirah **חֶסֶד**, for he is told that the cattle can be saved if it is brought to shelter.

Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that

¹³⁹Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 293.

¹⁴⁰Ovadia Sforno, *Sforno: Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987), pp. 288-289.

¹⁴¹Exodus 9:25.

¹⁴²Exodus 9:19.

the Master of Mercy gave them time to repent. At first there was just normal hail, and the thunder burst out in lightning, so that “fire went earthward” and only damaged the ground. It was only after that, when they still did not repent that “there was hail and fire flaming amidst the hail”: fire and water made peace with each other in order to burn and destroy Egypt, a wonder “such as had never been seen.”¹⁴³

Hail is frozen rain precipitating in the form of small balls having concentric layers of clear ice and snow. The right column of the Tree of Life is the column of water and **הַקֵּד** is on the right column. The association of hail with the Sefirah **הַקֵּד** is called out by the Zohar and the Bahir. The Zohar tells us that the angel associated with the Sefirah **הַקֵּד** is Michael and the Bahir tells us that Michael is associated with water and hail.

What is the meaning of the verse

Also one opposite the other was made by God.¹⁴⁴

He created Desolation (**בְּהוֹ**) and placed it in Peace, and He created Chaos (**תְּהוֹ**) and placed it in Evil.

Desolation is in Peace, as it is written

He makes peace in His high places.¹⁴⁵

This teaches us that Michael, the prince to God’s right, is water and hail, while Gabriel, the prince to God’s left is fire. The two are reconciled by the Prince of Peace. This is the meaning of the verse “He makes peace in His high places.”¹⁴⁶

How does hail, frozen rain, get associated with **הַקֵּד**? The Zohar¹⁴⁷ associates the Sefirah **הַקֵּד** with the the interrogative pronoun **מִי**, which means *who* and this same **מִי** is the **מִי** of

¹⁴³Zalman Sorotzkin, *Insights in the Torah*, Shemos, trans. Ralph Blumberg (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 91.

¹⁴⁴Ecclesiastes 7:14.

¹⁴⁵Job 25:2.

¹⁴⁶*The Bahir*, trans. and comm. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), p. 135.

¹⁴⁷*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), pp. 114, 286.

From the womb of Whom (מִי) came forth the ice.¹⁴⁸

The Zohar continues

God, we have learned, has made seven firmaments on high, all of which acknowledge the glory of the Almighty and are capable of pointing the lesson of true faith. Now there is above these seven a hidden firmament which guides and illumines them. Of this one we cannot discover the true nature, however much we inquire, and therefore it is designated by the interrogative particle מִי (Who), as has been pointed out: hence the Scripture says:

From the womb of Whom (מִי) came forth the ice.¹⁴⁹

which has been explained to refer to the highest firmament over the other seven.¹⁵⁰

Now the Zohar tells us that חֶסֶד is a derivative of or emanates from חֶסֶדֶת.¹⁵¹

So the hail of the plague associated with חֶסֶד can be understood to come from the ice of חֶסֶדֶת, the Sefirah immediately above חֶסֶד in the right column, the column of water.

The shephard of חֶסֶד, loving kindness, is the patriarch Abraham of whom Eliezer Damascus, the person in charge of Abraham's household says as he arrives in Aram-naharaim, the land of Abraham's nativity:

O Lord, God of my master Abraham, send me, I pray Thee, good speed this day, and show *loving kindness* (חֶסֶד) unto my master Abraham.¹⁵²

And after Eliezer finds Rebekah at the fountain he says:

Blessed be the Lord, God of my master Abraham, who hath not forsaken His *loving kindness* and His truth toward my master.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸Job 38:29.

¹⁴⁹Job 38:29.

¹⁵⁰*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 286.

¹⁵¹*The Zohar*, vol. 4, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 286.

¹⁵²Genesis 24:12.

¹⁵³Genesis 24:27.

The Zohar associates Abraham with water. About Abraham, the Zohar says that

he observed so strictly the laws regarding clean and unclean that no man in a state of ritual impurity was allowed to serve in his house until he had duly cleansed himself by bathing before night-fall or by abstention for seven days, according to the degree of his defilement. ... The reason why Abraham did this was because he was himself pure and is designated “pure” (as it is written,

Who can bring forth a pure one from one impure?¹⁵⁴

which is a reference to Abraham, who was born of Terah). R. Simeon said that it was in order to confirm Abraham in his special grade, which is symbolized by water, that he set out to keep the world pure by means of water.¹⁵⁵

The word **בָּרָר** occurs as **בָּרָר** five times, in the form **הַבָּרָר** seven times, in the form **וְבָרָר** two times, and in the form **וְהַבָּרָר** three times. The five corresponds to the five Sefirot that are on the right or lean to the right. The seven correspond to the seven lower Sefirot. The two corresponds to the two columns, and the three corresponds to the upper three Sefirot **בִּינָה**, **חֲכָמָה**, **בְּתָר**.

Locusts **אַרְבֵּה**

*Tomorrow I will bring the locusts into thy border: and they shall cover the face of the earth, so that it will not be possible to see the earth. And they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remains to you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which grows for you out of the field. And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all Egypt, which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth to his day.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴Job 14:4.

¹⁵⁵*The Zohar*, vol. 1, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 328.

¹⁵⁶Exodus 10:4-6.

We read in Midrash Rabbah:

Why did He bring the locusts upon them? Because they had made Israel sowers of wheat and barley; hence did He bring the locusts which devoured all that the Israleites had sown for them.
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Rabbi Alshech tell us that the subject of the words *not be possible to see the earth*

are the locusts themselves; they will cover the earth in such density, that they themselves cannot see what they are eating, as they can only see the other locusts around them. Normally, locusts descend on vegetation closely following the areas which have been seeded and have begun to sprout. In this case, arrival of the locusts will be sudden, and they will cover the whole country simultaneously. This despite the fact that they will have little to feed on, namely only what the hail has left undamaged. Although they must be hungry, they will only consume what is left לָכֶם, to you. They will not touch what belongs to the Israelites, i.e. the province of Goshen.¹⁵⁸

Rabbi Epstein asks

Why did the Holy One Blessed be He bring a locust plague upon them? Because they made the Jews sowers of grain and barley and all kinds of beans; therefore, He brought upon them a locust plague, which destroyed all that the Jews had sown for them.¹⁵⁹

*So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night. And when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.*¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 154.

¹⁵⁸ Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 297.

¹⁵⁹ Rabbi Boruch Halevi Epstein, *The Essential Torah Teminah*, Shemoth, trans. Shraga Sliverstein (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1989), p. 31.

¹⁶⁰ Exodus 10:13.

Rabbi Sorotzkin says that

Every other time he stretched out the staff towards the spot from where the Plague was to begin. Why did he stretch it out over all of Egypt this time, and not eastward, from where the locusts came?

We can explain that whenever the Staff created the Plague, Moses would hold it toward the place from where the Plague would issue. But the locusts were already created and ready, sleeping in the ground of the eastern lands (*Midrash HaGadol*). If Moses had held out his staff eastward they would have arisen and destroyed that particular area. So he held it out over Egypt so that they would come up throughout the entire land and destroy.¹⁶¹

*And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the borders of Egypt. Very grievous they were.*¹⁶²

Rabbi Sorotzkin explains that very grievous here means that

these locusts blinded people's eyes, cut down trees and ate up clothing and jewelry ... [and] were wounding people's bodies.¹⁶³

And this is the reason that Pharaoh says to Moses:

*Entreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only.*¹⁶⁴

Cassuto explains that

Although locusts are an endemic plague of Egypt it was far severer than usual on this occasion:

*before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall there be such.*¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹Zalman Sorotzkin, *Insights in the Torah*, Shemos, trans. Ralph Blumberg (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 100.

¹⁶²Exodus 10:14.

¹⁶³Zalman Sorotzkin, *Insights in the Torah*, Shemos, trans. Ralph Blumberg (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 100.

¹⁶⁴Exodus 10:17.

¹⁶⁵Exodus 10:14.

(a traditional hyperbole, which occurs in similar form in Joel 2.) For they – the locusts – covered the face [literally ‘eye’] of the whole land so that the land was darkened – that is, the face of the land became black on account of the locusts that were on it (the expression ‘darkened’ contains an anticipatory allusion to the plague of darkness that followed –

*and they did eat every plant of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left.*¹⁶⁶

The hail did, indeed, leave something, but after the locusts not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, thorough all the land of Egypt.¹⁶⁷

It is interesting that the land becoming black was a foretaste of the Plague of darkness which was to follow.

After Moses entreated the Lord to end the plague of locusts the Lord turned a very strong wind of the sea, a west wind,

and the wind lifted the locusts and thrust them – that is, cast them, and sank them – into the Sea of Reeds – east of Egypt; and consequently not a single locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. There may be a preparatory allusion here to what will subsequently be stated concerning the host of Pharaoh, who also sank in the Sea of Reeds.¹⁶⁸

*And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.*¹⁶⁹

The word **אַרְבֵּה** means locust. Its cognate **אַרְבֵּה** has the meaning of a window, i.e. a hole, through which smoke may pass, like a chimney, or a

¹⁶⁶Exodus 10:15.

¹⁶⁷Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987), p. 127.

¹⁶⁸Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987), p. 127.

¹⁶⁹Exodus 14:28.

window of heaven through which the rain comes or through which blessings come as in:

Test me in this says the Lord of Hosts and see if I will not open for you the *windows* of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it.¹⁷⁰

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken open, and the *windows* of heaven were opened.¹⁷¹

The Zohar tells us

“And the *windows* of heaven were opened” refer to the upper waters.¹⁷²

Now the upper waters come from **הַקְּמָה**, which is likened to heaven, For the Sefirah **הַקְּמָה** heads the right column, the column of water. So if **הַקְּמָה** is associated with heaven, then the Sefirah **בִּינָה**, Understanding, that follows it on the Tree of Life can be likened to looking through an opening to heaven, a window through which what is in heaven can be understood. So **אֶרְבֵּה** can be associated with the Sefirah **בִּינָה**.

Darkness חֹשֶׁךְ

And the Lord said to Moses,

*Stretch out thy hand towards heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched out his hand towards heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt. For three days they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.*¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰Malachi 3:10.

¹⁷¹Genesis 7:11.

¹⁷²*The Zohar*, vol. 1, Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 202.

¹⁷³Exodus 10:21-23.

Why did God bring a plague of darkness? Because

all the advancement and success of the Egyptians were due to their dark magic; darkness was, therefore, their proper due.¹⁷⁴

The Ramban says of this darkness

The meaning thereof is that this darkness was not a mere absence of sunlight where the sun set and it was like night. Rather, it was a *thick darkness*. That is to say, it was a very thick cloud that came down from heaven. It is for this reason that He said,

*Stretch out thy hand towards heaven.*¹⁷⁵

to bring down from there a great darkness which would descend upon them and which would extinguish every light, just as in all deep caverns and in all extremely dark places where light cannot last [as it is swallowed up in the density of the thick darkness].¹⁷⁶

Rabbi Epstein explains

Scripture tells us that when a Egyptian stood up, he could not sit down again, and that when he sat down, he could not stand up again; for he groped in pitch-blackness, as it is written: “and groping in the dark.”¹⁷⁷

Sforno interprets the phrase *and darkness which may be felt*, וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ as

And darkness will depart. The verb וַיִּמַּשׁ is usually interpreted as meaning a darkness that was so intense and substantive it could be felt. The Sforno, however interprets it as the *hilphil* of the root מוּשׁ, *to depart*, or *remove*. The meaning of the phrase is thus: the usual normal darkness of the night would depart and be replaced by a dense unique darkness which no light could penetrate.

¹⁷⁴*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 157 footnote 2.

¹⁷⁵Exodus 10:21.

¹⁷⁶Nachmanides, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, Exodus, trans. Rabbi Charles Chavel, (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), p. 108.

¹⁷⁷Rabbi Boruch Halevi Epstein, *The Essential Torah Teminah*, Shemoth, trans. Shraga Sliverstein (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1989), p. 31.

Thus Sforno says:

And the natural (normal) darkness of night will be removed. For indeed the darkness of night is atmosphere prepared to receive light. It is only dark due to the absence of light. This darkness, however, will be a substance that cannot receive light because of its great density (thickness), not because of the absence of light, and since it is not it is not prepared to receive (light), therefore

They saw not one another.

For the light of a candle and torch was not sufficient (to illuminate this darkness).¹⁷⁸

Rabbi Hirsch says that the plague of darkness

was the most all-embracing and affected the whole of each person. Every man was completely cut off from his fellow man, and from access to his possessions. He was prevented from using hand or foot to obtain the necessities of life. It was the most complete, the most comprehensive literal עָנָוִי. It meant each man being held, chained and fasting, to the spot in which he happened to be.

וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ (cause them to feel, to touch) the Hiphil of מִישׁ. Samson in his blindness, begged his guides

make me touch the pillars¹⁷⁹

And וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ would accordingly mean “darkness would cause the Egyptians to use their sense of touch”; they would in no wise be able to use their eyes for differentiation of objects, they would literally be thrown back on their sense of touch. This certainly implies that they were also unable to help themselves with artificial illumination.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸Ovadia Sforno, *Sforno: Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987), pp. 294-295.

¹⁷⁹Judges 16:26.

¹⁸⁰Rabbi Samuel Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 2, Exodus, trans. Isaac Levy, (Gateshead, Judaica Press, 1989), p. 113.

Rabbi Sorotzkin says that the darkness

was punishment for darkening Israel's lives with hard labor.¹⁸¹

We read in Midrash Rabbah:¹⁸²

From whence did that darkness come? R. Judah said: From the darkness above, for it says:

He made darkness His hiding place, His pavilion round about Him.¹⁸³

This darkness is the same darkness as in

And darkness was upon the face of the deep.¹⁸⁴

This darkness is the upper darkness, the darkness associated with the innermost aspect of the Sefirah חֶכְמָה, Wisdom. For the thought in חֶכְמָה is from a source that is not known, undisclosed and withdrawn in itself.¹⁸⁵

It is from this darkness that light comes.

This light issued from the darkness which was carved out by the strokes of the Most Recondite.¹⁸⁶

The light that illumines, originates from this darkness of חֶכְמָה, and illumines through the Sefirah בִּינָה.

When Thought illumines, though from what source is not known, it is clothed and enveloped in בִּינָה, Understanding, and then further lights appear and one is embraced with the other until all are intertwined.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹Zalman Sorotzkin, *Insights in the Torah*, Shemos, trans. Ralph Blumberg (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 103.

¹⁸²*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 156.

¹⁸³Psalm 18:12.

¹⁸⁴Genesis 1:2.

¹⁸⁵*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 252.

¹⁸⁶*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 120.

¹⁸⁷*The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 213.

The Sefirah חֶכְמָה, Wisdom, corresponds to the non-verbal all-at-once intuitive knowing. It is the place that can be sought but is not disclosed. What is disclosed is through the Sefirah בִּינָה, which corresponds to the verbal analytic and linear reasoning aspect of understanding. From this point of view, בִּינָה is light since it can be readily seen in a public manner. But חֶכְמָה, cannot be seen in a public way. We connect to חֶכְמָה in mystery.

When my mind is concentrated on the highest, there is higher still that which can never be known or grasped, the starting-point that is absolutely concealed, that produced what it produced while remaining unknowable, and irradiated what it irradiated while remaining undisclosed. It is the desire of the upward-striving thought to pursue after this and to be illumined by it. In the process a certain fragment is detached and from that fragment, through the pursuit of the upward-striving thought, which reaches and yet does not reach it, there is a certain illumination. The upward striving thought is thus illumined by a light undisclosed and unknowable even to that thought.¹⁸⁸

The innermost aspect of חֶכְמָה is darkness. Yet from this darkness comes the revelation, the light, that בִּינָה shines when the Wisdom of חֶכְמָה is given to it.

Slaying of the First Born מַבַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת

Thus says the Lord,

About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of cattle. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel, not a dog

¹⁸⁸ *The Zohar*, vol. 1, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), pp. 212-213.

*shall move its tongue, neither against man or beast.
That you may know that the Lord differentiates be-
tween Egypt and between Israel.*¹⁸⁹

Why did God execute the plague of the slaying of the firstborn? As it explains in Midrash Rabbah¹⁹⁰ because the Egyptians

trusted their idols. So what did God do? He smote their gods together with them. One which was of wood, rotted; of stone, melted; those of silver, gold and brass, He reduced to their original molten state, as it says:

Upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments¹⁹¹

Cassuto explains:

About midnight, when the day of retribution arrives, I will go out, like a king issuing forth to do battle with his foes, into the midst of Egypt, whereupon a terrible plague will come upon Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the highest to the lowest, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sits on his throne – that is, who is due to sit upon his father’s throne after the latter’s death, or who is now enthroned as prince – even to the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill. This expression, “the maidservant who is behind the mill,” is common in Egyptian literature in the sense of “the poorest of the poor” (it occurs, for example, in the opening section of the instructions of Ptah-Hotep). Thou hast said that I, Moses, shall die on the day that I see your face; However, I declare to you in the name of my God that I shall not die, but all the firstborn of Egypt will die, and even your firstborn son shall perish. Not only the firstborn of human beings shall die, but also *all the firstborn of the cattle, even the firstborn of the animals to which you attribute a divine character, like the bulls of Apis and the cows of Hathor; then*

¹⁸⁹Exodus 11:5-7.

¹⁹⁰*Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus, vol. 2, trans. Rabbi S. M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 178.

¹⁹¹Numbers 33:4.

you will realize that I execute judgments upon all the gods of Egypt.¹⁹²

Pesikta Rabbati explains what the firstborn encompasses.¹⁹³

What is implied by all in the expression all the firstborn? That firstborn males sired by men, firstborn males given birth to by women, and even firstborn females died that night. Hence it is said *all the firstborn*. ...

It was not only the firstborn who died. If it were, why should Scripture go on to say,

*There was not a house where there was not one dead.*¹⁹⁴

Since it is possible that there were houses where there were no firstborn, what is meant by saying *There was not a house*, etc? R. Abba bar Hama explained: In a house that had no firstborn the Holy One, blessed be He, smote the one who was put in charge of the house, as is said

He smote all the firstborn in Egypt, the chief of all their substance.¹⁹⁵

the word *chief* being understood as in the verse

Shimri the chief, for though he was not the firstborn, yet his father made him chief.¹⁹⁶

Rabbi Alshech explains further:

Proof that these deaths really occurred simultaneously, would be the cries of the bereaved, which would all be heard at the same time. It would be one outcry, not a series of outcries. We have

¹⁹²Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1987), p. 133.

¹⁹³*Pesikta Rabbati*, trans. William Braude (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 837.

¹⁹⁴Exodus 12:30.

¹⁹⁵Psalms 105:36.

¹⁹⁶1 Chronicles 26:10.

stated, and we know from the *Haggadah shel Pesach*, that God's retributive actions are accompanied by subordinate forces called

Fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, an embassy of evil messengers.¹⁹⁷

How do we know that if God Himself had not struck down the firstborn, they had not been killed by any of these other forces representing God's anger?

The proof lay in the fact that not a single Jewish firstborn died, not even a dog wailed. This would be sufficient evidence that the hand of God Himself had been at work. This is why this phenomenon had to be predicted in verse 7. Since Baba Kama 60 says that when destructive forces are abroad, dogs can be heard to bark, since they are sensitive to such presences, the fact that only the dogs in the Jewish neighborhoods kept silent would be ample testimony that only Egyptians were dying.¹⁹⁸

The Sefirah **כֶּתֶר**, Crown, corresponds to the will which is the first or primary aspect of our spiritual being. The will is our first-born. We are the first-born of God.

*Israel is my son, my firstborn.*¹⁹⁹

The word Israel, **יִשְׂרָאֵל**, can be divided into two parts: **אל**, which means God, and the root **יִשַׁר**, which means to *go straight*, to *be straight*, *just*, *upright*, *pleasing*, *agreeable*, *fair-dealing*, or *honest*. Israel, therefore, has the meaning of straight to God. The Israelites are people who going straight to God align their wills with the will of God. That is why we read

*Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast, it is Mine.*²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷Psalm 78:49.

¹⁹⁸Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim Alshech, *Torat Moshe*, trans. Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1988), p. 302-303.

¹⁹⁹Exodus 4:22.

²⁰⁰Exodus 13:2.

*All the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.*²⁰¹

*The firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me.*²⁰²

*Mine is every firstborn: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto Me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast, Mine they shall be: I am the Lord.*²⁰³

*For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; instead of all that openeth the womb, even the firstborn of all the children of Israel, I have taken them unto Me. For Mine are all firstborn, among the children of Israel, both man and beast; on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself.*²⁰⁴

*Pesikta Rabbati*²⁰⁵ mentions the phrase “innermost parts of the belly” in speaking about the womb.

With lashings that wound Thou wouldst have cleansed away evil – the Egyptians did not consent to let them go. When did they let them go? After the smiting [of that which comes out] of the innermost parts of the belly – that is, after the smiting of the firstborn:

*And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.*²⁰⁶

The opening of the “womb of God” is **בְּתָר**. Our will is to become God’s will, for that is how we receive God. Interestingly enough, the slaying of the firstborn, **מִכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת**, contains within it the letters **כ**, **ת**, and **ר**, the letters of **בְּתָר**.

The Slaying of the first-born of the Egyptians corresponds to the slaying of the will of those who live in limitation, in bondage. For in limitation and

²⁰¹Exodus 13:13.

²⁰²Exodus 22:28.

²⁰³Numbers 3:13.

²⁰⁴Numbers 8:16-17.

²⁰⁵*Pesikta Rabbati*, trans. William Braude (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 833.

²⁰⁶Exodus 12:29.

bondage, the will has been killed. The leader of the Egyptians, Pharaoh, is a leader who says

*Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord.*²⁰⁷

The will of Pharaoh has no desire to recognize or align itself with the will of God. In the end, this will is annihilated. This is the slaying of the first-born.

Conclusion

The King's Tactics

We read in *Pesikta Rabbati*

R. Jose bar Hanina taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, moved against the Egyptians with the tactics used by a king in command of his army. How so? In the word's use, when a province rebels against a king, what does the king do to it? He first shuts off its water. So did the Holy One, blessed be He. He first turned the Egyptians' water into blood as is said

*Over all their ponds of water that they may become blood.*²⁰⁸

What does a king do next? He brings up trumpeters to sound a warning against the province. Even thus the Holy One, blessed be He, brought frogs against Egypt to serve as trumpeters of a warning against Pharaoh, as is said

*Concerning the trumpeting of the frogs*²⁰⁹

What does a king do next to the rebellious province? He makes a trench in the earth round about it. Even thus did the Holy One, blessed be He, as is said

²⁰⁷Exodus 5:2.

²⁰⁸Exodus 7:19.

²⁰⁹Exodus 8:8.

*Smite the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats
[lice]²¹⁰*

What does a king do next to the province? He brings his troops in swarms against its people. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, brought swarms of wild animals against the Egyptians, as is said

*And the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms
of wild animals²¹¹*

What does a king do next to the province? He orders a manhunt in which he slays the innocent and guilty alike. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, brought pestilence upon the Egyptians:

*Surely now I had put forth My hand, and smitten thee
and thy people with pestilence²¹²*

What does a king do next to the province? He showers burning tar upon its people. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, afflicted the Egyptians with boils like burning tar.

*And they took soot of the furnace and stood before
Pharoah and Moses sprinkled it up heavenward; and
it became a pox breaking out in blisters on man and
beast.²¹³*

What does a king do next to the province? He brings up catapults. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, catapulted hail upon the Egyptians.

*And the Lord sent thunder and hail and the fire rained
down upon the ground.²¹⁴*

²¹⁰Exodus 8:12.

²¹¹Exodus 8:17.

²¹²Exodus 9:15.

²¹³Exodus 8:10.

²¹⁴Exodus 9:23.

What does a king do next to the province? He sends storm troops against its people. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, sent locusts against the Egyptians in Egypt, locusts of which it is said

*They enter in at the windows like a thief*²¹⁵

What does a king do next to the province? He puts its people in prisons. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, did to the Egyptians:

*They saw not one another*²¹⁶

What does a king do next to the people of the province? He slays the oldest among them. Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, slew the oldest, [the firstborn, that is] of the Egyptians.²¹⁷

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²¹⁵Joel 2:9.

²¹⁶Exodus 10:23.

²¹⁷*Pesikta Rabbati*, trans. William Braude (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 838-840.