

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Tzav - Pesach 5785

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Rabbi Yosi HaGlili kicks off a discussion on how many times the Egyptians were struck.

**וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֹרְטָמִים אֶל־פַּרְעֹה, אֲנַחְנוּ אֱלֹקִים הוּא.**

“And the necromancers said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of the Lord.’” (Pesach Haggadah and Shmos 8:15).

The Baal Haggadah uses this pasuk to show that if the strikes in Egypt were just one finger, then at Kriyas Yam Suf, where it says “hand of Hashem” that number was five times the amount—there are five fingers on a hand. This pasuk is from the Torah’s narrative of the makos in Eretz Mitzrayim; it is from the mako of lice. What was so special about the lice that the necromancers said this was the finger of Hashem? Also, were the necromancers able to reproduce any of the strikes? Why were they not able to reproduce the ones they could not?

There were several marvels that Aharon performed that the necromancers were able to produce. Moshe and Aharon appeared before Pharaoh and asked that Bnei Yisroel be given a holiday so they could worship Hashem. (Shmos 5:1). Pharaoh responded that he does not know Hashem. (Ibid 5:2). Pharaoh then demanded that they show a marvel to prove the power of Hashem. (Ibid 7:9). Aharon casted down his staff and it turned into a sea serpent. (Ibid 7:10). The necromancers were able to reproduce this marvel. (Ibid 7:11). Later, Moshe and Aharon confronted Pharaoh and Aharon turned the water into blood. (7:20). The necromancers were able to reproduce the wonder. (Ibid 7:22). The same occurred again when Aharon brought up the amphibians onto the land. (Ibid 8:2). The necromancers were also able to bring up amphibians onto the land. (Ibid 8:3). Until that point, the necromancers were three for three.

Then Aharon struck the dust and it turned to lice. (Ibid 8:13). However, this time, the necromancers tried to reproduce the lice but they could not. (Ibid 8:14). The pasuk says, “And the necromancers did similar with their spells, to bring forth lice, but they were unable to. And it was lice that was upon man and beast.” (Ibid). They then told Pharaoh, “This is the finger of the Lord.” (Ibid 8:15). Why did the pasuk say that there were lice on man and beast when the previous pasuk already said that? Also, why did they finally capitulate and call this the finger of Hashem?

After this, the necromancers were quiet. They did not try to reproduce any of the other makos. Regarding boils, the Torah does say that “the necromancers were unable to stand before Moshe because of their infliction of boils.” (Ibid 9:11). While they did not attempt any other mako, the Torah hints that they may have been able to reproduce the boils but they were too sick to try. What was different about the rest of the makos and what was similar between boils and the first three wonders?

The answer to these questions is in the pasuk that says, “Go before Pharaoh...and stand opposite him on the bank of the Nile River, and take the staff that you turned into a nachash, in your hand.” (Ibid 7:15). The word nachash here is often translated as serpent or snake. This is the same staff that Moshe turned into a nachash by casting it on the ground. (Ibid 4:3). Nachash נָחָשׁ is the same word as נֹחָשׁ nochash which means divination. (Vayikra 19:26). Before sending him back to Mitzrayim, Hashem told Moshe to take this staff with him. (Shmos 4:17). What is divination?

Soon after Adam and his woman were created, divination accosted the woman. “And the nachash was clever, different from all the other animals in the field.” (Bereishis 3:1). The nachash was not a snake. A snake is an animal and it does not talk. This nachash was punished by going on its belly and eating dust. (Ibid 3:14). Snakes already crawl on their belly (see Vayikra 11:42) and they do not eat dust. Also, the word for snake is the same as belly, גִּחְוֹן. We see this from the river called Gichon that “snakes” around the entire Land of Kush. (Bereishis 2:13). This nachash was not a snake but divination itself. It manifested in a way that the woman could see it. It was clever, it was able to speak. It desired the woman to be more angel-like, like itself, and so it convinced her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. By eating its fruit, the woman would become angel-like, never sinning, and the divinity would be able to pair with her. Hashem then cursed the divinity.

The curse that Hashem placed upon the divinity is that, “You are cursed to be separate from all animals and all living things in the field.” (Ibid 3:14). This means it was no longer free to travel the world. Instead, “on your belly you shall go and dust you shall consume.” (Ibid). The divinity was cursed to now be attached to the ground. The Gemara teaches through the story of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach that witchcraft and dark magic are attached to the ground. (Bavli Sanhedrin 44b). This is the key to understanding the necromancers in Egypt.

Moshe turned his staff into divination by casting it on the ground. After that he was able to perform the boiling hail and the splitting of the Yam Suf through it. Aharon cast his staff to the ground and on the ground, it was able to turn into a sea monster. The necromancers, too, could replicate that marvel as long as their rods were on the ground. Aharon’s staff consumed the other rods after they were lifted off the ground. (Shmos 7:12). That was a wonder the necromancers could not replicate. Further, the necromancers were able to turn ground water into blood and bring up amphibians from the river. All that was attached to the ground. The lice are what stumped the necromancers. Dust is attached to the ground. They should have been able to reproduce it. However, they could not. As the pasuk says, the dust turned into actual lice that was on man and beast. It was not dust that looked and acted like lice. It was actual lice. This is what stumped them and this is when they admitted that it was the finger of the Lord.

The other makos—flying insect swarms, pestilence, boiling hail, locusts, and darkness—were all out of their purview because they are not attached to the ground. The boils, made from kiln ash, was something they could reproduce—possibly—if they were not so inflicted. Thus, they admitted it was the finger of Hashem—not only the lice but all the signs, wonders, and marvels.