

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS VAERA

And I appeared to Avraham to Yitzchak and to Yaakov with [the name] El Shaddai, and My name Hashem, I did not make known to them (Ex. 6:3).

Rabbi Naftali Katz of Frankfurt (*Smichas Chachmaim* to *Brachos* 13a *s.v. masiv, ofen 18*) points out that the final letters of the names Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov (אברהם יצחק יעקב) spell out Hashem's name Shaddai (ש-ד-י), when decoded using the א"ת ב"ש method.

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And I also heard the plea of the Children of Israel that the Egyptians are working them, and I remembered My treaty (Ex. 6:5).

The Gemara (*Brachos* 5a) says that when the Bible says, “For whom Hashem loves, He reproaches” this is the source for the idea that suffering can atone for one’s sins. The Gemara continues to explain that the end of the phrase “fortunate is the one whom God afflicts, and from Your Torah, we learn it” means that this property of suffering can be derived from the Torah itself. However, this point is a source of dispute; how exactly do we see from the Torah that suffering atones for sins? The first opinion argues that this is derived from the Torah’s rule that a slave goes free if his master knocks out one of his limbs, if the pain of one limb has such redemptive properties, then certainly suffering which afflicts the entire body can also prove redemptive. Reish Lakish offers another understanding: Regarding the pain and suffering due to befall those who fail to uphold the Torah, the Torah says, “These are the words of the treaty (ברית)” and regarding the requirement to put salt on all sacrifices, the Torah says, “do not discontinue the salt-treaty (ברית)”. The word “treaty” is used for both salt and suffering to teach that just as salt sweetens meat and makes it edible, so does suffering sweeten one’s life by erasing his sins. Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank (*Har Tzvi* here) explains the difference between these two opinions. If the source that suffering atones for one’s sins is from the Halacha that if a *master* knocks out his servant’s limb the servant goes free, then this only applies to suffering brought about by one’s *master*, not any type of suffering. After all, a servant is not set free if he loses a tooth in a bar-room brawl! However, if the source is the biblical connection of salt and suffering, then any type of suffering should atone for one’s sins. The Jewish people were really being enslaved by Divine decree, but the Jews described in this verse "the

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Egyptians working them" which would thus not require Hashem to set them free, but he did so anyway by remembering his *bris*, the textual linkage that teaches us that suffering sets one free regardless of its source.

Therefore, say to the Children of Israel I am Hashem (Ex. 6:6). The expression “therefore, say ...” appears only twice in the Torah, once here and once regarding the giving of a special “covenant of peace” to Pinchas and his descendants (Num. 25:12). Rabbi Chaim Palagi (*Tenufah Chaim* 7) explains that this can be understood in light of the idea that the Ultimate Redemption can only occur when there is peace amongst all the Jewish People. For example, the Torah says, “And there was a King in Jeshurun, when the heads of the nation gathered together—[all] the tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:5)”, which Rashi explains that Hashem is truly King over the entire Jewish People when there is no dispute amongst them. In fact, the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:10) explicitly teaches that the word “dispute” (מחלוקת) is an acronym for the terms “plague, fury, smiting, curse, abomination” (מכה חרון לקוי קללה תועבה), all of which, God forbid, may befall the Jewish People when there is disagreement. But when everybody together agrees to serve Hashem, then the Ultimate Redemption can transpire. This is the connect between the story of the Exodus and Pinchas’ “covenant of peace” which linked via the phrase “therefore, say...”¹

And Pharaoh also called to the wisemen and the magicians, and they—the Egyptian necromancers—also did so with their flashes [of magic]; and each man cast his staff and they became serpents and Aharon’s staff swallowed their staffs (Ex. 7:11–12). Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir in *Ezror Eliyahu* writes that the Egyptian magicians did not actually bring their own staffs, they actually brought serpents. Rabbi Avraham Palagi (*Avraham Anochi* 10) cites this explanation and questions the source of the assertion that the Egyptian magicians did not actually bring staffs, especially because the Torah seems to clearly say that they did. To resolve this, Rabbi Palagi notes that the difference in wording between the Torah’s account of Aaron’s staff turning into a snake and the Egyptian magicians’s account of their staff turning into a serpent suggests really what the Egyptian magicians threw to the ground was always a serpent, yet they first held in their hand an actual staff.

¹ See Maharal in Netzach Yisrael ch. 25 regarding the nature of exile and how by definition it means Jews are at odds with one another.

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Meaning, the Egyptian magicians came with staffs, but had serpents up their sleeves, then when they “threw down their staffs” they actually used their sleight of hand to give the appearance of them throwing down their staffs, when actuality, they really threw down the serpents that they had concealed in their hand. Accordingly, what they threw on the floor were actually serpents the entire time. Then, Hashem performed a miracle which turned those serpents into staffs, such that Aaron’s staff ate their staffs.

And they will transform into blood (Ex. 7:17). Many sources (including Rabbi Yitzchok Izaak Chaver in *Yad Mitzrayim* to the Haggadah Shel Pesach p. 49, and Rabbi Chaim Vital in *Moadei Ha-Ari* p. 16, *Baal Shem Tov Al HaTorah* Parshas Masei, and *Mevaser Tov al HaTorah* p. 58) explain that the Jewish exodus from Egypt resembled childbirth. The years that the Jews were slaves in Egypt corresponded to the months of gestation, and the final Exodus corresponded to the actual birth. Accordingly, it makes a lot of sense that there was blood involved in the Exodus, just as there is blood in childbirth.² R. Yisrael of Kohznitze (*Avodas Yisrael*, 2nd Day of

² Rabbi Chaim Vital (*Machaberes HaKodesh, Shaar Yetzias Mitzrayim*) explains that each of the Ten Plagues is somehow related to the birthing process. He explains that the Plague of Blood is related to childbirth because the Talmud says (*Krisos* 10a) that the uterus does not open without releasing some blood. Therefore, the opening for the exodus came about through blood. If the uterus did not first open up to release blood, then the baby might choke or drown in blood when it starts to breath. In the case of the Exodus, the blood represents the powers of impurity which were about to choke the Jewish People had they stayed longer in Egypt. The plague of frogs (עפרת) represents the seventy cries of a woman in childbirth (which correspond to the seventy words in Ps. 20 which talks of a time of distress). The Plague of Darkness last six days and was broken up into two three-day segments with differing degrees of darkness. This mimics the first two trimesters of pregnancy and the different places in which the fetus dwells inside the womb. The Plague of the Firstborn, by which all the firstborn Egyptians died corresponds to the newborn child’s ability to overpower all the different destructive forces inside his mother’s womb which might be a detriment to him. By leaving the womb and escaping those forces, he shows that he has overpowered them. Yet, just as in the Plague of the Firstborn, the most dangerous of all Egyptians—the Pharaoh himself—was not killed, so too does childbirth not inoculate a child against the most dangerous of all destructive forces—his own Evil Inclination. Rather, he must continuously contend with that force and remains in mortal danger. This is

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Pesach) similarly explains that on the first night of Pesach, there is a special divine light which is revealed from Above without us having to arouse that sort of revelation. However, this divine light is then immediately taken away from us, such that during the ensuing 49 days, we must strive to bring it back through our own efforts. That is what we do during the *Sefiras HaOmer* in the days between Pesach and Shavuot. This, of course, is reminiscent of a fetus to whom all of the Torah is revealed on a silver platter, but as he is born, he forgets everything. He must then spend the rest of his life seeking to return that Torah knowledge which was originally revealed to him *in utero*. The only way for him to do this is through his own efforts, it will not be simply “given” to him like the first time around. This also accounts for the Talmudic assertion (*Brachos* 50a) that upon the exit from Egypt, even fetuses in their mother’s womb sang thanks to Hashem. The final redemption which we still await is also compared to a woman giving birth. The time preceding the arrival of the Messiah is traditionally referred to as *chevlei moshiach* (“the birth pangs of the Messiah”), and, indeed, the prophet Micah (Mic. 7:15) foretells that the final redemption will resemble the miraculous and wondrous redemption from Egypt.³

And the frog arose and covered the Land of Egypt (Ex. 8:2). The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 67b) records a dispute about the meaning of this verse. Rabbi Elazar said that there was only one frog, but from it spawned an entire population of frogs, and they covered the entire Egypt. Rabbi Akiva said that there was only one frog, and it

because the Evil Inclination enters a child immediately when he is born, but his Good Inclination only arrives when he reaches majority (i.e. 13 years old for a boy, and 12 for a girl).

³ See also *Sanhedrin* 98b which records: Rav said that the Davidic savior will only come after the Jews have been subjugated for nine months, and Rashi explains that nine months is the gestation period of a human child. Rabbi Shmuel Rosovsky (*Shiurei Rabbi Shmuel, Sanhedrin* vol. 2, p. 753) cites in the name of the Ponovizher Rov the following idea: Rashi (to Ps. 42:2) and *Yalkut Shimoni* (Psalms 541) explain that when a female gazelle gives birth, it suffers much pain because its birth canal is very narrow. As a result, the gazelle cries out to Hashem during childbirth to help ease the process, so Hashem send a snake to bite the gazelle in its womb and help it open up faster and expedite the birth. The Ponovizher Rov explained that the Holocaust was like this snake which Hashem sent to expedite the Final Redemption and make things move along faster. However, in order to finalize the matter, we must also do our role and make sure that we are fitting to merit the coming of the Moshiach. If we do not better ourselves in order to ready the way for Moshiach, then the suffering we experienced in the Holocaust will be for naught.

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itself actually covered the entire Egypt. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya criticized Rabbi Akiva and said, “Akiva, what are you doing with Aggadic discussions? Leave these topics and go study the tractates Negaim and Ohalos. It was only one frog, but it croaked and summoned frogs from all over the world, and they covered the entire Egypt”. Why was Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya so offended with Rabbi Akiva’s explanation that there was only one frog? *Chasam Sofer*, writes (*Toras Moshe*, see also *Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah*) explains the problem behind Rabbi Akiva’s explanation. The Talmud (*Pesachim* 53b) cites the Thaddeus Man of Rome as explaining that when Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya allowed Nebuchadnezzar to cast them into a fiery furnace instead of bowing to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol, their rationale was derived from the behavior of the frogs in the Plague of Frogs. The Torah tells us that the frogs in this plague made an extra effort to terrorize the Egyptians by making sure to go into every Egyptian space—even in the Egyptians’ ovens. This, of course, led to the frogs’ deaths. From here, explains the Talmud, Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya extrapolated that one should give up one’s life in order to sanctify the Name of Hashem. However, this extrapolation is not wholly justified, because there is a great difference between Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya and the frogs: Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya were created like all other people to perform a whole set of commandments, not just the commandment of sanctifying the name of Hashem. The frogs, on the other hand, only came into existence for the purpose of the Plague of Frogs in order to sanctify the name of Hashem. As long as this difference remains true, then Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya’s rationale falls apart. This is why Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya rejected Rabbi Akiva’s explanation: Because according to Rabbi Akiva, there was only one frog and it was only created for the purposes of this plague, the objection to Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya’s extrapolation remains true, and there is no way to derive from the frogs why they should have given up their lives. However, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya resolves the objection Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya’s logic. He argues that the frogs which participated in the Plague of Frogs were an assemblage of frogs from around the world. They were not simply created for the purposes of this plague, but were drawn from all the frogs. Accordingly, there is no difference between Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya who were created to perform all sorts of commandments and the frogs who were also created for all sorts of reasons, not just to give up their lives. If in such a case the frogs still gave up their

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lives, then Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariya reasoned that they should be expected to do the same.

And the frog arose and covered the Land of Egypt (Ex. 8:2). As mentioned above, there is a dispute as to the meaning of this passage. Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Elazar understood that the entire plague started with one frog (from which other frogs may have been begat), while Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya understood that there was one frog who summoned all the other frogs to join the plague. In the Haggadah Shel Pesach *Sdei Tzofim* (p. 185), the following is related in the name of Rabbi Yekusiel Aryeh Kammelhar: He explains that the Rabbis of the Talmud would sometimes dress their comments about current events in Biblical terms in order to avoid making overt references to what was happening in their time. It seems that at some point, a certain Jew-hater became a prominent leader and immediately anti-Semitism came on the rise. The Jewish thinkers of the time began to disagree over how to understand this phenomenon in the same way that they argued about the relationship between Hitler's rise to power and the rise of German anti-Semitism during World War II. Some argued that it was German anti-Semitism which brought about Hitler's rise to power, so the root of the issue was a collective anti-Semitism. Others argued that it was Hitler's influence and rise to power which created German anti-Semitism. This is the dispute between Rabbi Akiva/Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya. Rabbi Akiva/Rabbi Elazar understood that the whole plague can be traced back to one single frog whose ideas spread like poison amongst the masses until they were all convinced and joined the bandwagon. However, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariya disagreed. He felt that one individual cannot possibly have so much influence and do so much damage. Instead, he argues that even before the single frog (i.e. Hitler) came along, the land was filled with all sorts of closeted anti-Semites. However, just as the single frog's croak attracted all the other frogs to come out of the woodwork, so did Hitler's anti-Semitic rhetoric and dog-whistling bring all the German anti-Semites out into the open.

And the necromancers did the same with their flashes to spawn lice, but they could not. And the lice [which Moshe and Aaron brought] were upon the men and the animals (Ex. 8:14). Rashi explains that the necromancers could not successfully bring out lice with their powers were accessed by summoning demons, and demons have no dominion over creatures which are smaller than a grain of

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barley. According to Rashi, the Egyptian necromancers used demons, not black magic. However, the Tosafists (*Daas Zekanim* and Chizzkuni) explain that the Egyptian necromancers could not successfully reproduce lice of their own because in order for them to use their magic, they needed to be standing directly on the ground, yet the lice from Moshe and Aaron already covered the ground, thereby forming a barrier between the feet of the necromancers and the ground.⁴ Indeed, we find in the Talmud Yerushalmi that when Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach oversaw a crack-down on witches, he instructed his students who participated in the sting operation to lift the witches from the ground such that they could not use their magic on them. Accordingly, *Daas Zekanim* and Chizzkuni understand that the Egyptian necromancers used magic/witchcraft, unlike Rashi. See also *Sanhedrin* 67b which differentiates between “flashes” and “whispers” (לטיהם / להטיהם) by explaining that one refers to magic/witchcraft and one refers to summoning demons (see *Maharsha* and *Sefer Ha-Aruch* for different opinions about which one refers to which).

And Hashem said to Moshe, “arise early in the morning, and stand in front of Pharaoh” (Ex. 8:16). Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (*Ohr HaChaim* to Ex. 9:13) explains that “stand in front of Pharaoh” means that Moshe should stand straight, and not bend his posture like those who stand in front of those greater than them. Rather, Moshe should stand before Pharaoh in the same manner as one who stands in front of somebody inferior to them. This is because Hashem had already appointed Moshe

⁴ However, this begs the question: If the necromancers could not perform their magical feat simply because their feet were not directly on the ground, then why did their inability to reproduce the same plague as Moshe and Aaron lead them to say “This is the finger of God”? They should have simply said that Moshe and Aaron were able to bring lice *through magic* because their feet were directly on the ground, while they could not because the lice already there served as a barrier. How did the Plague of Lice prove to them that Hashem was intervening here? Rabbi Moshe Aaron Freidman of Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem answers based on the *Beis HaLevi* (Ki Seitzei) who wrote that anything done through witchcraft is really non-existent, because there is no reality to magic. Accordingly, the necromancers knew that if Moshe and Aharon brought lice through magic, then that lice should not have impeded on their ability to also bring lice, because anything brought through magic is really non-existent, such that there would actually not be anything between themselves and the ground. The fact that the lice that Moshe and Aaron brought *did* stop them from bringing their own lice proved to the necromancers that Moshe and Aaron’s lice was real and did not come through magic, but must have been the “finger of God”.

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as a “master” or “ruler” over the Pharaoh and he was to command the Pharaoh to release the Jewish People. Yet, in his great humility, Moshe's natural way of presenting himself to other was through a posture of submission (especially because Moshe was constantly aware of Hashem’s presence and presented himself accordingly). In order to obviate that mannerism of his, Hashem specifically told Moshe to “stand [tall]” in front of Pharaoh, and not show him any signs of submission. This is reminiscent of what Rabbi Moshe Alshich (Exodus ch. 8) relates that the Pharaohs would purposely build the entrance to this chambers low, such that whoever enters would have incline in his head and thereby bow to the Pharaoh’s idols. However, when Yaakov entered the Pharaoh’s chambers, a miracle happened on his behalf that raised the top of the doorway, such that Yaakov could enter without bending down. According to this, we can explain that when Moshe was about to stand in front of Pharaoh, Hashem warned him not to bend his head when entering, because that act could be taken as an approval of idolatry.

...because if you are not sending My nation, I will send forth upon you, and your servants, and your nation, and your houses, the mixture [of wild animals]. And the Egyptian houses will be filled with the mixture [of wild animals], as well as the ground upon which they will be (Ex. 8:17). When a group of hooligans treated the prophet disrespectfully, the Bible relates “And two bears came out of the forest and damaged from them forty-two children”. The Talmud records are dispute between Rav and Shmuel over whether this involved a single miracle or a double miracle. According to the first opinion, this involved a single miracle, because the forest was already there, and the miracle was that Hashem had bears come into existence. According to this second opinion, this involved a double miracle, because not only did Hashem miraculously bring these bears into existence, He also made the forest miraculously come into existence. The Talmud asks why Hashem had to miraculously make a forest for the bears to come from, why didn’t He just make the bears come into existence without also bringing a forest into existence? The Talmud, as explained by Rashi, answers because otherwise, the bears would have been too scared to attack people. When a bear emerges from a forest to attack somebody/something, it is emboldened by the knowledge that if threatened, it can always run back into the forest and hide. When that option is not there, then the bear would be too scared to attack. So Hashem created a forest and also the bears, so

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that those bears would have the wherewithal to attack. Based on this,, Rabbi Yehonasan Eyebschitz in *Midrash Yehonasan* explains that when Hashem brought upon the Egyptians a mixture of wild animals, He also made sure to bring along “the ground upon which they will be”, meaning the wild animals’ natural habitats, so that the wild animals will have the confidence to actually be fearsome and attack. The same explanation is cited by Chida in *Devarim Achadim (drush 11)* and *Nachal Kedumim* in the name of Rabbi Heschel of Krakow (although it is well-known that the explanations of Rabbi Heschel and Rabbi Eyebschutz are often confused for one another and cited in the other’s name). Rabbi Yitzchok of Volozhin (*Peh Kadosh*) similarly explains that dangerous animals are sometimes only hazardous in their own homeplace, but if they are brought to a different land, then they become tame and are not as dangerous. For this reason, when Hashem brought about the mixture of wild animals, He brought with them a bit of their own land, so that they will feel “at home” and continue to be as dangerous as they normally would be. Finally, Rabbi Pinchas Halevi Horowitz of Frankfurt (*Panim Yafos*) explains in the name of his grandfather that Hashem brought the “ground” along with the mixture of wild animals because included in the mixture of wild animals is an animal called the *Adnei HaSadeh* which is mentioned in *Kilayim*, at the end of ch. 8. This animal was like a Venus flytrap in that it was actually a plant that was attached to the ground, and could not be removed from its ground. So in order to accommodate the *Adnei HaSadeh*, Hashem brought its “ground” along with it. This explanation is also cited by *Nachal Kedumim* in the name of Rabbi Heschel of Krakow (and is also brought in *Chanukas HaTorah* in his name), as well as in *Kol Eliyahu* in the name of the Vilna Gaon, and *Divrei Shaul* in the name of Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathansohn.

We shall slaughter the abomination of Egypt in [front of] their eyes, and they will not stone us? (Ex. 8:22). *Pas’sbegen HaDas (Chiflayim le-Sushiah)* explains that the argument here is not that they were scared that the Egyptians would kill them if they slaughter sheep in front of them. After all, the Jews had already seen some of the miraculous plagues which Hashem brought as punishment to the Egyptians. There were already quite confident that Hashem was looking out for them, and would not allow the Egyptians to stone them. Rather, the argument here is that even if the Egyptians would not be able to stone them for disrespecting their god, it is still “not nice” or “impolite” to slaughter the Egyptians’ god in their presence. Therefore, they

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argued that for the sack of etiquette, they should be allowed to leave Egypt and offer their sacrifices elsewhere.

Behold! The Hand of Hashem is upon your flock that is in the field—upon the horses, upon the donkeys, upon the camels, upon the cattle, and upon the sheep—[with] a very heavy pestilence (Ex. 9:3). Rabbi Avraham Palagi (*Avraham Anochi* to the Haggadah Shel Pesach, 29) asks why the Plague of Pestilence only affected the domesticated animals, but not the wild animals or birds. He answered that the Plague of Pestilence was a punishment which Hashem wrought upon the Egyptian animals because the Egyptians worshipped those animals. Since they only worshipped the domesticated animals mentioned in this passage, but not other wild animals or birds, then Hashem did not strike the wild animals or birds. See also what his father Rabbi Chaim Palagi writes in his commentary to the Haggadah Shel Pesach, *Chaim La-Rosh* (29) to answer this question in the name of both his son Rabbi Yitzchak Palagi, and his son Rabbi Avraham Palagi, and offers an approach of his own.

And behold!, of the Jewish flock none died until one (Ex. 9:7). The Malbim (to Ex. 14:28) explains that “until one” means “until but not including one”. In other words, he maintains that one animal from the flocks of the Jews actually did die. He finds parallel wordings to this which are understood to mean that there was one exception. For example, when relating that all the Egyptians who pursued the Jews into the Red Sea died, the Torah says, “none remained from them until one”, which tradition explains means that one person of the Egyptian army survived the Splitting of the Sea—Pharaoh. Similarly, when telling of the Jewish victory over the army of the Canaanite Yavin, the Bible says “none remained until one” (Jud. 4:16), which is understood to refer to the Canaanite general Sisera who survived the battle and died later. Here too, asserts the Malbim, one animal of the Jewish did die, the animal of the man whose mother was Jewish and his father was Egyptian (mentioned in Lev. 24:10). This is because before the Sinaitic Revelation in which the Torah’s Laws were revealed, Jewishness was determined by patrilineal descent and this person did not have the Halachic status of a Jew (as Ramban in the end of Parshas *Emor* cites in the name of the French sages), but of an Egyptian, so his animal died in the plague. Pharaoh did not know that this man wasn't really Jewish, so he decided that even the Jewish animals were affected by this plague and it was not confined to the Egyptians.

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He then used this an excuse to ignore the message of the plague and harden his heart. This idea is also cited in the name of the Vilna Gaon.

And Moshe threw... (Ex. 9:8). Rashi explains that this was a miracle that Moshe was able to throw into the sky with one hand what for other people would be require two hands. This is because Moshe's two hands are considered by the Torah like one hand. See Ex. 17:11 which describes Moshe raising his hands during the war with Amalek, yet the Torah uses the word *yado*, literally, "his [singular] hand" as opposed to *yadav*, "his hands". This is because, as Rav Tzadok and others explain, the concepts of right and left allude to the opposing forces of good and evil in the world. However, truth be told, the existence of two such forces is only a mirage; in truth, there is only one force in the world—Hashem, and He is wholly good. Accordingly, Moshe who reached the highest level of understanding Hashem that is humanly possible, served as an example to teach the world that the left and right are really united. For this reason, what takes other people two hands to achieve, Moshe could do with one hand. This, in fact, is the crux of the battle against Amalek. The Amalekite philosophy sought to argue that serving Hashem is not one's only valid choice, there are other, opposing, options as well. In order to fight this ideology, Moshe lifted both his hands to the sky to remind the Jewish People that both the left (the seemingly evil) and the right (the good) are united in the One and Only Hashem. This served to strengthen their conviction in believing in Hashem, thereby weakening the influence of the blasphemous ideology spewed by the Amalekites.⁵

⁵ The same battle was fought by Mordechai in the Book of Esther. By refusing to bow to Haman, Mordechai taught the world that worshipping someone other than Hashem is not a viable option. Mordechai is described as an *Ish Yemini* which can mean a "right[-handed] man" and was a descendant of Binyamin (whose name literally means, "son of right"), who likewise did not bow to Eisav, the progenitor of the Amalekites and Haman (because when Yaakov Aveinu and his family encountered Eisav, Binyamin was not yet born). Indeed, the members of the tribe of Binyamin—despite their association with the right side—are actually branded as "lefties" (see Jud. 20:16). This means that their left hand was their main hand. In other words, their left hand *became* their right hand, in the same way that Moshe Rabbeinu used both hands as one. They represented the fact that there is no good and evil—only Hashem (who is wholly good). Moreover, just as Moshe Rabbeinu taught this lesson from the vantage point of having risen to the fiftieth

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...because this time, I will send forth all My plagues to your heart, and upon your servants and your nations, so that you will know that there is none like Me in the entire land (Ex. 9:14). Rashi explains that the expression “all My plagues” used here serves to teach us that the Plague of the Firstborn is equivalent to all the other plagues put together. Rabbi Chaim Vital (*Eitz HaDaas Tov*, vol. 2 §348) questions Rashi’s comment by noting that the passage at hand was said about the Plague of Hail, not the Plague of the Firstborn. Instead, Rabbi Chaim Vital explains that Rashi did not literally mean that the last of the ten plagues equaled the other of the plagues, but that the last *set* of the ten plagues equaled the other *sets* of the plagues. As we know from the Haggadah Shel Pesach, Rabbi Yehuda broke up the ten plagues into three sets: **1דם צפרדע כנים 2 ערוב דבר שחין 3 ברד** (**דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב** (**ארבה חשך בכורות**). The Plague of Hail is the first plague of the last *set*, and about that *set*, Rashi explained that equaled the other *sets*.

level of understanding, so did Mordechai’s defeat over Haman teach this lesson to the masses, when Haman was finally hanged on gallows which reached 50 handbreaths into the sky.

*Much of the material presented in **Oneg!** has been translated from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff’s weekly **Aalefcha Chochma** parsha sheet in Hebrew by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein. To sign up to the **Oneg!** weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of **Oneg!** send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com*