

1

Ramban
לכח: כח

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra says that since [the necromancers] had done as Aaron did regarding the wonder of the *tanin*, as well as regarding the plagues of blood and frogs, and now were unable to do so, i.e., to duplicate Aaron's wonder, they said to Pharaoh, "This plague has not come about through Aaron on behalf of Israel; rather, it is a plague from God, in accordance with the constellations of the stars that have influence over the land of Egypt." For Pharaoh did not deny the existence of the Creator, but only the Name that Moses mentioned to him.¹⁷ And it is along the same lines as the verse, *for His*

על כן חזק - *hand did not afflict us; but it was all by chance that this befell us (I Samuel 6:9).* Therefore Pharaoh's heart became strengthened.¹⁸ - לב פרעה

2

Rather, the matter is as the plain understanding of the [verse] suggests, namely, that when the necromancers saw that they were unable to bring forth lice they acknowledged that Aaron's actions were miracles from God on behalf of Israel. And that is why Pharaoh did not summon them again from then on. And it was to minimize the matter that they said, "It is

as if to - כלומר מכה קטנה מאתו - *the finger of God*" and did not say, "It is the *hand of God*,"²² say "It is only a small plague from Him."²³

3

The Holy One said: This evil person boasts and calls himself a crocodile, as it is written, "The great crocodile ..." (Yechezkel 29:3). Go and tell him: "See this staff, it is a piece of dry wood; it shall become a crocodile with life and soul and swallow up all the other staffs, and it is destined to revert to a dry piece of wood. The same is true of you; I created you from a putrid drop and gave you an empire and you boasted and said, 'My river is my own and I have made it for myself.' Behold I shall turn you back to nothingness and chaos. You swallowed up all the staffs of the tribes of the children of Israel, behold I shall cause you to disgorge all you have swallowed..." (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemos 7:181).

4

בנוהג שבעולם בני אדם מוליכין - It is the universal custom that people transport their wares to a place where [the inhabitants] need them. Do they bring fish oil to Spain,^[66] or fish to Acco?^[67] אין אתם מיד שלח והביא תינוקות מן - Don't you know that all [forms of] sorcery are in my domain?^[68] Thereupon, [Pharaoh] sent for and brought children from their school, and they did so, too.^[69] And not only that, but he summoned his wife and she did so,^[70] as it states, *Pharaoh, too* [גם], *summoned his wise men*, etc. What is indicated by the word *too*?^[71] - מהו "גם"? It indicates that [Pharaoh] summoned also his wife^[72] and she did this act of sorcery. Verse 11 then states: *and they too* [גם] - *the necromancers of Egypt - did so with their incantations.* מהו - What is indicated by this second extraneous mention of the word *too*? - אפילו התינוקות של ר' ור' שנים קרא ועשו כן - It indicates that [Pharaoh] summoned even children of four and five years of age, and they performed this act of turning staffs into serpents. With these demonstrations Pharaoh showed Moses that he was not in the least impressed by the Jewish leader's "wondrous" sign.

5

At that time, i.e., when Aaron, followed by Pharaoh's sorcerers, were going to turn their staffs into serpents, the Holy One, blessed is He, said, "If the serpent of Aaron will swallow the serpents of the Egyptians, there is nothing remarkable in that, for it is a natural occurrence that a snake swallows a snake. Rather, let [Aaron's serpent] return to its original state as a staff and then swallow their serpents!" For what is the meaning of *and the staff of Aaron swallowed their staffs*?^[95] אמר רבי - מלמד שחזר המשה בבריותו ובלע אותן - R' Elazar said: This was a miracle within a miracle;^[96] [our verse] teaches that the staff of Aaron returned to being a staff as per its original state, and then it swallowed [the sorcerers' staffs]. בשראף פרעה בן תמה ואמר ומה אם יאמר למשה בלע לפרעה - And when Pharaoh saw this he was astonished and said, "And what if [Aaron] says to the staff, 'Swallow up Pharaoh and his throne!' - It would swallow him^[97] at once!"^[98]

שם דבר: כח

23 And he went up from thence unto Beth-el, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him: 'Go up, thou baldhead; go up, thou baldhead.'

24 And he looked behind him and saw them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tore forty and two children of them. *Kings 2 chapter 2*

וְרַב וְשִׁמְעוֹן דִּישְׁמַעְיָא — Rav and Shmuel disagree regarding this incident.
 וְרַב אָמַר אֶחָד אָמַר שֶׁכָּל הַיָּמִים שֶׁהָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — One said that it involved a single miracle,
 וְשִׁמְעוֹן אָמַר שֶׁכָּל הַיָּמִים שֶׁהָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — and the other one said that it involved a
 מִרְקָא בְּיָמֵי אֶחָד — miracle within a miracle, i.e. two miracles. כָּתוּב וְאָמַר — The one who says that it was a single miracle maintains that
 וְשִׁמְעוֹן אָמַר שֶׁכָּל הַיָּמִים שֶׁהָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — there was a forest already there, but
 שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — there were no bears in the forest. The bears appeared as a result
 עַל־כֵּן אָמַר אֶחָד אָמַר שֶׁכָּל הַיָּמִים שֶׁהָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — of Elisha's curse.⁽¹⁾ But the one who
 אָמַר שֶׁכָּל הַיָּמִים שֶׁהָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — says that it was a miracle within a miracle contends that
 שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — there was no forest there previously, nor
 שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה שָׁם אֵלֶּיךָ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — were there bears. Both appeared miraculously.

וְרָשׁוּ רַגְבִּי שְׁמִעוֹן הַשְּׁלוֹמִי. — R' Shimon the Shilonite expounded:
בְּשִׁמְעוֹן הַשְּׁלוֹמִי וּבְדַבְרֵיָּהּ הָיָה הַנֶּחֱמָל הַמִּשְׁתָּל. וְעַתָּה לִירוֹחַ בְּבִקְיָהּ הָאֵשׁ.
When the wicked Nebuchadnezzar cast Chananiah, Mishael
and Azariah into the fiery furnace, וְהָיָה לְקִיָּם בְּרוֹחַ הָאֵשׁ
stood before the Holy One, Blessed is He, וְכִבּוֹתָ שֶׁל עֲלֵם — and
said before Him: מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אַתְּ מְבַרְכֵנִי לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא מִבְּנֵי הָאֵשׁ
permission, I shall descend and cool off the furnace, and save
these righteous men from the fiery furnace. — With your
Gabriel said to [Yurkamo]: אַרְיֵה וְאַחֲרָיו אַתְּ מְבַרְכֵנִי לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא מִבְּנֵי הָאֵשׁ
— The power of the Holy One, Blessed is He, is not fully mani-
fest in this manner, וְעַתָּה שֶׁל הַקִּדּוּשׁ בְּרוֹחַ הָאֵשׁ בָּקִי — and
everyone knows that water extinguishes fire. — אֵלֶּיךָ אֲנִי שָׁרָה — and
אֲנִי אֶלֶּיךָ, I, the ministering angel of fire, וְהָיָה לְקִיָּם בְּרוֹחַ הָאֵשׁ
and Azariah — shall descend and make cold from within the furnace,
וְהָיָה נֶחֱמָל וְכִבּוֹתָ נֶחֱמָל — and burn from without,^[1] וְהָיָה נֶחֱמָל וְכִבּוֹתָ
אֲנִי וְאֶנִּי will thereby perform a miracle within a miracle.^[2]
אֲנִי וְאֶנִּי — The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to
him: Descend! וְהָיָה נֶחֱמָל וְכִבּוֹתָ נֶחֱמָל — At that time
Gabriel began speaking and said: "וְהָיָה לְקִיָּם בְּרוֹחַ הָאֵשׁ — and the
truth of Hashem is eternal."^[3]

L.V.
C.O.C.

Q

As we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt, we are impressed by the distinct tendency of the Bible to relate the events in natural terms. The frogs came out of the river when the Nile rose, the wind brought the locusts and split the sea. Behind the passages in the Bible we may discern a distinct intention to describe the plagues as naturally as possible. The Bible never emphasizes the unnaturalness of the events; only their intensity and force are emphasized.

Israel, however, who looked upon the universal occurrence as the continuous realization of a divine ethical will embedded into dead and live matter, could never classify the miracle as something unique and incomprehensible. Both natural monotony and the surprising element in nature express God's word. Both are regular, lawful phenomena; both can be traced to an identical source. In the famous Psalm 104, *Barchi Naf'shi* (My soul will bless), the psalmist describes the most elementary natural phenomena such as the propagation of light in terms of wonder and astonishment—no different from Moses' Song at the Sea. The whole cosmos unfolds itself as a miraculous revelation of God. The demarcation line between revelation and nature is almost non-existent. (*The Emergence of Ethical Man*, pp. 187-189)

The primary way in which we encounter G-d is not through miracles but through His word – the revelation – Torah – which is the Jewish people's constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of G-d. To be sure, G-d is in the events which, seeming to defy nature, we call miracles. But He is also in nature itself. Science does not displace G-d: it reveals, in ever more intricate and wondrous ways, the design within nature itself. Far from diminishing our religious sense, science (rightly understood) should enlarge it, teaching us to see "How great are Your works, O G-d; You have made them all with wisdom." Above all, G-d is to be found in the voice heard at Sinai, teaching us how to construct a society that will be the opposite of Egypt: in which the few do not enslave the many, nor are strangers mistreated.

The best argument against the world of ancient Egypt was Divine humour. The cultic priests and magicians who thought they could control the sun and the Nile discovered that they could not even produce a louse. Pharaohs like Ramses II demonstrated their godlike status by creating monumental architecture: the great temples, palaces and pyramids whose immensity seemed to betoken divine grandeur (the Gemara explains that Egyptian magic could not function on very small things). G-d mocks them by revealing His presence in the tiniest of creatures (T. S. Eliot: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust"). *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks* "Of Lice and Men" *YU Torah.org*