

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



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Va'era, Sicha 2

The Midrash

The Midrash states that the plague of frogs illustrated the immaculate design and purpose of everything in creation: “Rabbi Acha bar Chaninah said, even the things which seem superfluous in the world such as snakes and scorpions are included in the creation of the world [and therefore have a purpose]... and even the frog... for without the frog, how could G-d have exacted justice from the Egyptians?” (Shemos Rabbah, 10)

The Question:

The plague of frogs was only one of ten, and not the harshest by any metric — why does the Midrash imply that it was critical to the downfall of Egypt?

The Explanation:

There are three general forms of rejecting G-d, each progressively starker:

There are those who acknowledge G-d's ultimate dominion over creation, but

believe that he delegated power and autonomy to other forces. G-d is merely the “G-d of all gods.” Therefore, they refrain from defying G-d's will because they recognize His power.

Even while recognizing that G-d is a powerful force, there are those who maintain that they are autonomous and outside of G-d's purview. G-d may be powerful in theory, but He is irrelevant because we are self-made and self-sufficient.

Then there is the firm denial of G-d's existence at all.

While strident atheism seems to be the most severe form of rejection of the Divine, it is graced with a silver lining. When someone feels compelled to vociferously reject G-d's existence, they are constantly preoccupied with wrestling with G-d and denying Him. To the outside observer, it is clear that this person thinks deeply about G-d, that the possibility of G-d's existence touches him deeply enough for him to actively deny it. G-d's existence is present, then, in the atheist's rejection.

In the second form of heresy, however, where the person acknowledges G-d's reality but rejects that He has any relevance to his own life, G-d becomes a non-entity. The person lives their life without contemplating G-d. By assigning G-d to some ethereal realm with no bearing on life on earth, G-d becomes more non-existent than He is for the atheist.

Pharaoh represented this second form of rejection. He acknowledged the existence of G-d, but declared, "My river is my own, and I made myself." Therefore, Egypt had to be shown that G-d's dominion extends over all of creation, that nothing is exempt from G-d's intervening hand. This was best

accomplished by the frog. The frog is a harmless creature, unlike the snake and scorpion. Harmful creatures allude to the third category of atheist, who reveal G-d paradoxically by their notorious rejection. But the frog is innocuous, and alludes to Egypt's blithe rejection of G-d, where G-d may exist, but that is irrelevant to real life.

By striking Egypt with the frog, G-d demonstrated that His power extends even to the indifference of the frog. Meaning, even those who would prefer to relegate G-d to irrelevance had to acknowledge G-d's reality and embeddedness within every element of creation. This is why it was the plague of the frogs that was the beginning of undoing Egypt's particularly anodyne evil.
