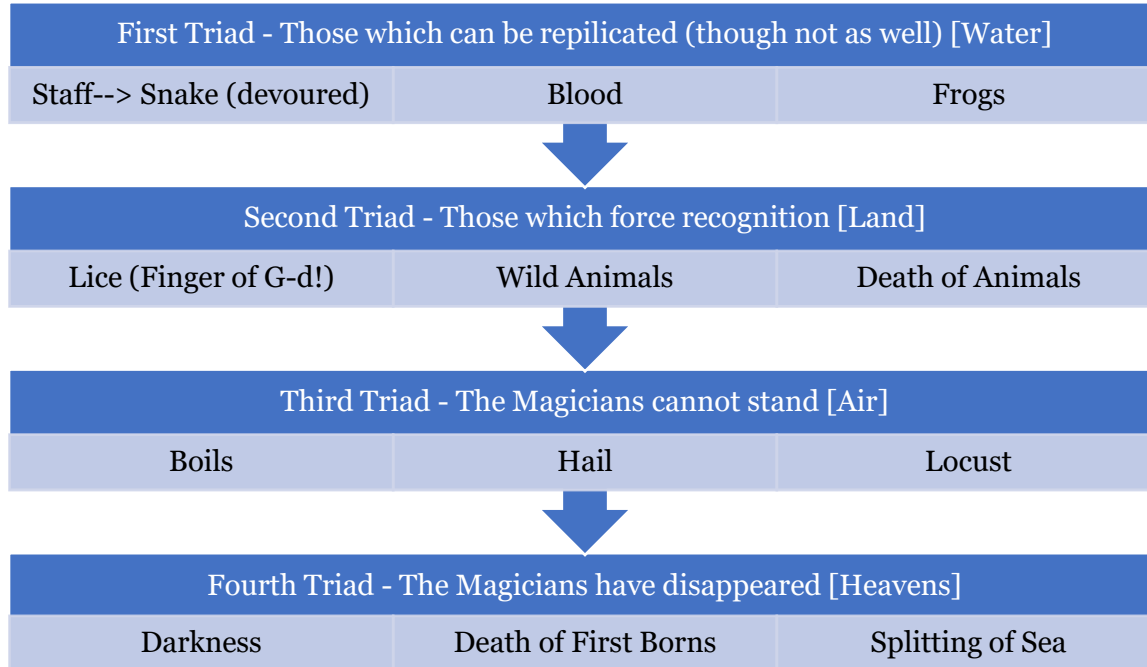




**The 12 Makkot – the 4 Triad Theory**  
Rabbi Jonathan Ziring: [jjziring@torontotorah.com](mailto:jjziring@torontotorah.com)



**1. Shemot Rabbah 9:6**

ו [ז, יא] ויקרא פרעה לחכמים ולמכשפים, באותה שעה התחיל פרעה משחק עליהם ומקרקר אחריהם כתרנגולת ואומר להם כך אותותיו של אלהיכם בנוהג שבעולם ב"א = בני אדם = מוליכין פרקמטיא למקום שצריכין להם כלום מביאין מורייס לאספמיא דגים לעכו אין אתם יודעין שכל הכשפים ברשותי הן, מיד שלח והביא תינוקות מן אסכולי שלהם ועשו אף הם כך, ולא עוד אלא קרא לאשתו ועשתה כך, שנאמר ויקרא גם פרעה מהו גם שאף לאשתו קרא ועשתה כן, ויעש גם הם חרטומי מצרים, מהו גם אפילו התינוקות של ד' וה' שנים קרא ועשו כן.

And Pharaoh also called his wise men and magicians. At that moment, Pharaoh began to laugh and cackle at them like a chicken. He said, "these are the signs of you G-d!" Normally, people bring merchandise to a place that needs them. Do you bring fish brine to Apamea, or fish to Acco? Don't you know that all the magic is in my control. He immediately sent for children from their schools and they did the same. Even more so, he called his wife and she did the same, as it says "and Pharaoh also called." What does "also" mean? That he even called his wife and she did the same. "The magicians also did this." What does "also" mean? Even four and five-year-old children were called and they did this.

**2. Alhatorah.org – summary R. Yosef ibn Kaspi (modified), R. N"H Wessely, R. Y"S Reggio, Shadal**

**Nature of the miracles** – R. N"H Wessely suggests that the first wonder of each set served as a warning sign while the other two plagues served as punishments. He thereby explains that there is no warning for שָׁחִין, פְּגָמִים, and חֲשָׁךְ, as they themselves constituted warnings for the plagues which followed.

**Origin** – According to R. N"H Wessely, each triad stemmed from a different source: water land, air, and heavens.

**[Philo, On the Life of Moses I, XVI-XVII; XXIV:134**

XVII. For the elements of the universe, earth, water, air, and fire, of which the world was made, were all by the command of God, brought into a state of hostility against them, so that the country of those impious men was destroyed, in order to exhibit the height of the authority which God wielded...]

**Target** – R. N"H Wessely notes a progression in the severity of the Plagues from one set to the next. The plagues of the first triad destroyed the fish of the Nile, those of the second group attacked the cattle the third set ruined the agricultural produce, while the final plagues brought death to humans.

**Agent** – The pairs of punishment plagues in each set were brought by different agents. Aharon initiated **קָדַם** and **צָפַרְדֵּי**, Hashem directly brought **עָרַב** and **דָּבַר**, Moshe was responsible for bringing the **בָּרָד** and **אֲרָבָה**, while Hashem and Moshe combine to bring about **בְּכוֹרוֹת** and **גַּם סוּף**.

**Hardening of Paroh's heart** – According to this approach it is exactly midway through the Plagues (after the first two triads) that Hashem (rather than Paroh himself) begins to harden Paroh's heart.

**Magicians** – There is a gradual lessening of the magician's roles and status between the triads. In the first cycle the magicians are able to replicate all three wonders. By the second set, though, they can no longer bring the signs. In the third, their stature decreases even further, as due to the **שָׁחִין** they can no longer even stand before Paroh. In the last set they are missing from the story altogether.

### **3. The Ten Plagues, Norman Fredman, Tradition 20 (4), 1984**

The Ten Plagues had begun with God not accepted in the Egyptian pantheon. They end the same way-because now that pantheon is no more. And now Egypt is ready to be punished for killing God's firstborn son.

### **4. Ziony Zevit's, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues" Bible Review, June 1990.**

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/exodus/exodus-in-the-bible-and-the-egyptian-plagues/>

[A]ccording to this suggestion, the plague of blood (No. 1) was directed against the god Khnum, creator of water and life; or against Hapi, the Nile god; or against Osiris, whose bloodstream was the Nile. Frogs (No.2) was directed against Heket, a goddess of childbirth who was represented as a frog. The pestilence against cattle (No. 5) might have been directed against Hathor, the mother and sky goddess, represented in the form of a cow; or against Apis, symbol of fertility represented as a bull. Hail (No. 7) and locusts (No. 8 ) were, according to this explanation, directed against Seth, who manifests himself in wind and storms; and/or against Isis, goddess of life, who grinds, spins flax and weaves cloth; or against Min, who was worshiped as a god of fertility and vegetation and as a protector of crops. Min is an especially likely candidate for these two plagues because the notations in Exodus 9:31 indicate that the first plague came as the flax and barley were about to be harvested, but before the wheat and spelt had matured. A widely celebrated "Coming out of Min" was celebrated in Egypt at the beginning of the harvest.<sup>10</sup> These plagues, in effect, devastated Min's coming-out party.

Darkness (No. 9), pursuing this line of interpretation, could have been directed against various deities associated with the sun—Amon-Re, Aten, Atum or Horus. Finally, the death of the firstborn (No. 10) was directed against the patron deity of Pharaoh, and the judge of the dead, Osiris.

Additional data from Egyptian religious texts clarifies the terrifying tenth plague. The famous "Cannibal Hymn," carved in the Old Kingdom pyramid of Unas at Saqqara, about 2300 B.C.E., states: "It is the king who will be judged with Him-whose-name-is-hidden on that day of slaying the first born." ... [He notes that not all can explain this way...]