

פרשת וארא

Imagine if you will what if the first of the Ten Plagues, the one when all of the water in Egypt turned into blood, would have come with instructions of how to survive that plague.

Or, what would we think about a plague of frogs that gave instructions of how to prepare a frog repellent or suggestions on how to prevent lice prior to the onset of כינים, lice?

Most of us would probably relate to such phenomena as watered-down plagues, not having much value.

And, we know that such did not occur.

However, when we get to the seventh plague of ברד, hail, we find that such is exactly what did happen.

We read in our Parshas Voera (Sh'mos Perek 9/P'sukim 18-21):

הַנְּגִי מִמָּטִיר כְּעֵת מִחֹר בְּרֹד כָּבֵד מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָיָה כָּמוֹהוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם לְמַן הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְעַד עַתָּה: וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הָעֵז אֶת מִקְנֶךָ וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה כָּל הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא בַּשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא יֵאֶסֶף הַבֵּיתָה וְיֵרֵד עֲלֵהֶם הַבְּרֹד וּמָתוּ: הִירָא אֶת דְּבַר ה' מֵעַבְדֵי פְרַעֹה הַנִּיס אֶת עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת מִקְנֵהוּ אֶל הַבָּתִּים: וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׁם לְבֹ אֶל דְּבַר ה' וַיַּעֲזֹב אֶת עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת מִקְנֵהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה:

Behold I will rain down at this time tomorrow a very heavy hail that there has not been anything similar to it in Egypt since it was founded and until now. Now, send and gather your flocks and all that you have in the field; all people and all animals that will be found in the field and not in-gathered to the home – the hail will come down upon them and they will die.

Those who feared the word of G-d from among the servants of Par'o chased their servants and their cattle into the houses. Those who did not pay attention to the word of G-d, they left their servants and their cattle in the field.

What could the rationale be for giving an antidote for the plague before it was visited upon them?

There is a second question that we may ask regarding this plague of hail. An earlier verse (Posuk 14), in the context of this plague, reads:

כִּי בַפַּעַם הַזֹּאת אֲנִי שֹׁלַח אֶת כָּל מַגְפּוֹתַי אֵל לִבְךָ וּבַעֲבֹדֶיךָ וּבַעֲמָךְ בְּעִבּוֹר יַדְדֵּעַ כִּי אֵין
כָּמֹנִי בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ:

Because this time I Hashem am sending all of My plagues to your heart and against your servants and your people in order that you should know that there is none like Me in all of the land.

The phrase *כל מגפותי*, all of My plagues, is difficult to understand. Three more plagues will follow the present one of hail, to what does 'all My plagues' refer?

It is true that Rashi already answered this question centuries ago. He writes:

את כל מגפתי - למדנו מכאן שמכת בכורות שקולה כנגד כל המכות:

All of My plagues – we learn from this that the plague of killing the first-born was equal to all of the other plagues together.

All the commentators that deal with Rashi question how could this verse, written in the context of hail, refer to *Makkas Bechoros*, the tenth and final plague, that was months in the distance.

Although we will not relate here to their various explanations, we cannot ignore this powerful statement that was made within the context of the seventh plague.

Furthermore, even though we are quite aware that each and every plague itself was a miraculous act of G-d, that is, the events that occurred did not at all conform to the expected nature of things, the Torah writes and Chazal taught and Rashi brings, that the plague of *Borod*-hail had a number of miracles in it.

We read (Perek 9/P'sukim 23-24):

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִטְהוֹ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָיָה קוֹלֵת וּבָרָד וַתִּהְיֶה אֵשׁ אֶרֶץ וַיִּמְטֵר ה' בָּרָד
עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיְהִי בָרָד וְאֵשׁ מִתְלַקַּחַת בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּרָד כִּיבַד מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָיָה כָמוֹהוּ
בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאִז הָיְתָה לְגוֹי:

Moshe stretched out his staff towards the heavens and Hashem made thunder and hail and fire came to the ground and Hashem rained hail on the Land of Egypt. There was hail and fire igniting inside the hail; it was very

heavy; there was nothing like it in all of the Land of Egypt since it became a nation.

Rashi writes:

מתלקחת בתוך הברד - נס בתוך נס, האש והברד מעורבין, והברד מים הוא, ולעשות רצון קונם עשו שלום ביניהם:

Igniting in the hail – It was a miracle within a miracle that the fire and hail were mixed. Hail is water and in order to fulfil the will of their Master, they made peace between themselves.

Was there a comparable situation of נס בתוך נס, a miracle that had an additional inherent miraculous facet, contained within it with any of the other plagues?

Now one could perhaps argue that the plague of hail had to be more complex because it was a miracle qualitatively, not quantitatively. That is, this was not the first time that hail came down upon Egypt. This was not the final time that hail would rain down upon Egypt. There were episodes of hail before. The uniqueness of this episode of hail was its unmatched intensity.

Since there were other episodes of hail, there were those who would dismiss *Makkas Borod* as a Divine plague and would say that ‘it was just nature’. After all, hail is not a rare phenomenon. Therefore, Hashem had to make the miraculous nature of this plague indisputable and make its miracle more complex so that its event would not be referred to as ‘nature’.

It would seem that such an answer is unconvincing. The plague that follows *Makkas Borod* is that of locusts, ארבה. Egypt had suffered from such a plague in the past as well and it would suffer again many more times in the future. It is true that other significant plagues of locusts contained many species and this plague of locusts was from one species only. Nonetheless, it seems that this plague was primarily quantitative in nature and yet had no additional miracle intertwined within it.

What, then, is so unique about this punishment of the plague of hail?

Or HaChaim HaKodosh suggests that the emphasis of כל מגפותי is on the fact that it is *My* plagues and that they cannot be attributed to sorcery. The plague of hail had so many miracles contained within it – its Divine source could not be denied.

Or HaChaim writes:

כי באמצעות מכה זו יטה לבו להבין להרגיש במגפות שהביא עליו ה', יובן כי בכל מכה ומכה שהביא עד עתה לא היה מחליט פרעה בדעתו כי הם מא...ל'קי היכולת והיה תולה במכשפות ומעשה שדים, וזה לך האות שגם החרטומים עושים כן, והגם שהיתה מכה שאמרו החרטומים (שמות ח/טו¹) אצבע א...ל'קים היא, יש מקום לפרעה לחשוב כי אפשר כי האנשים ההמה לא השיגו השגת משה ואהרן במכשפות...לזה אמר אליו ה' כי בפעם הזאת באמצעות המכה אשר הביא עליך אני שולח את כל מגפותי...שתדע כי לא מעשה כישוף ושדים המה אלא מעשה א...ל'קים...

Through this plague Par'o's heart will turn to understand and to comprehend that the plagues came from G-d. It is understood that with the plagues that came until now, Par'o did not conclude that they were from the All-Able G-d because he attributed the plagues to sorcery and magic – and the proof was that his sorcerers also brought about such events.

And even regarding the plague of lice about which Par'o's wizards said that 'it is the finger of G-d' – Par'o perhaps thought that it was sorcery nonetheless, and that his sorcerers were not of the same caliber as Moshe and Aharon.

Therefore Hashem said via this plague of hail I will bring all of My plagues- I am sending plagues that are Mine that he should know that they are not a product of sorcery and magic – but an Act of G-d.

Or HaChaim HaKodosh explains that the emphasis of the verse is not the totality of the plagues, i.e. *all* of them, as much as it is emphasizing that all the plagues are *Mine*, from HaKodosh Boruch Hu. Just like sorcery cannot be attributed as being the cause of the plague of hail, so it cannot be attributed as being the source of any of the plagues. 'They are all Mine', says Hashem.

And there is more to wonder about. This issue has to do with time. In most cases, even when Moshe announces a plague in advance, we do not know how much in

¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֲרָטֹמִים אֶל פְּרֹעֶה אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים הִוא וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פְּרֹעֶה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה':
The sorcerers said to Par'o, 'It is the finger of G-d'; Par'o's heart hardened and he did not listen to them, as G-d said.

advance the declaration was. And when the plague comes to an end, we do not know exactly when it will be completed.

But there are exceptions to the above.

We read regarding מכת הצפרדעים, the plague of the frogs (Perek 8/P'sukim 5-6):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפָרְעוֹה הַתְּפָאֵר עָלַי לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלַעַמֶּךָ לְהַכְרִית
הַצִּפְרָדְעִים מִמֶּךָ וּמִבְּתֵיךָ רַק בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאֲרֶנָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַחֵר וַיֹּאמֶר כְּדַבְּרְךָ לְמַעַן תִּדְעַ
כִּי אֵין כֵּה' אֲ... לְקִינֹו:

Moshe said to Par'o, 'Make yourself more important than me – for which time should I pray for you and for your servants and for your people to excise the frogs from you and from your homes; they will only remain in the Nile.' Par'o said, '[Pray now that they should be removed] tomorrow;' [Moshe said] 'I will do according to your word in order that you should know that there is none like Hashem our G-d.

The plague began when Moshe and Aharon initiated it. But its cessation was given over to Par'o for him to appreciate G-d's majesty and to recognize that there was no sorcery at work here whatsoever.

However, when the plague of ערוב, marauding mixed animals was visited upon Egypt, an advance warning was given. We read (ibid. P'sukim 17-19, 25):

כִּי אִם אֵינְךָ מְשַׁלַּח אֶת עַמִּי הַנְּנִי מִשְׁלִיחַ בְּךָ וּבַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּבַעַמֶּךָ וּבְבִתֶּיךָ אֶת הָעֶרֶב וּמְלֹאוֹ
בְּתֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶת הָעֶרֶב וְגַם הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר הֵם עָלֶיהָ: וְהַפְּלִיתִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן
אֲשֶׁר עַמִּי עֹמֵד עָלֶיהָ לְבִלְתִּי הֵיוֹת שָׁם עֶרֶב לְמַעַן תִּדְעַ כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ: וְשִׁמַּתִּי
פְּדַת בֵּין עַמִּי וּבֵין עַמֶּךָ לְמַחֵר יְהִי הָאֵת הַזֶּה:

'If you do not send out My People, behold I will cast against you and against your servants and against your people and against your homes the marauding mixed animals and they will fill the houses of Egypt and also the ground that they are upon. I will distinguish the Land of Goshen that My People stand upon on that day that there will not be the mixed animals in order that you should know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land. I will make a separation between My People and between your people; tomorrow this sign will be.'

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא מֵעַמְךָ וְהִעֲתַרְתִּי אֶל ה' וְסָר הָעֶרְב מִפְּרֵעָה מֵעַבְדֵי וּמֵעַמּוֹ
מִחַר רַק אֵל יִסֹּף פְּרֵעָה הַתֵּל לְבִלְתִּי שְׁלַח אֶת הָעָם לְזַבַּח לָהּ:

Moshe said, 'Behold I am going out from you and I will pray to Hashem and the marauding mixed animals will turn away from Par'o and from his servants and from his people tomorrow; but, Par'o should not continue to mock, to not send the People to offer offerings to Hashem.

Moshe announced the termination of the plague. Such an announcement has been seen previously. Moshe announced here for the first time regarding the timing of the onset of the plague – the following day.

Undoubtedly, such advance warning had a purpose. We will see more of that purpose shortly.

The following plague of דבר, pestilence, also came with advanced notice. We read (Ibid. Perek 9/P'sukim 3-6):

הִנֵּה יַד ה' הוֹיָה בְּמִקְנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה בְּסוֹסִים בְּחֻמְרִים בְּגַמְלִים בְּבָקָר וּבְצֹאן דָּבָר כָּבֵד
מְאֹד: וְהִפְלָה ה' בֵּין מִקְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵין מִקְנֵה מִצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָמוּת מִכֹּל לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דָּבָר:
וַיִּשָׂם ה' מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר מִחָר יַעֲשֶׂה ה' הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה
מִמְחַרְתּוֹ וַיָּמָת כָּל מִקְנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּמִמִּקְנֵה בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא מִת אֶחָד:

'Behold, the Hand of G-d is against your flock that is in the field, against the horses and the donkeys and the camels, against the cattle and the sheep, a very heavy pestilence. Hashem will distinguish between the flocks of Israel and between the flocks of Egypt; not one from all of B'nei Yisroel will die.' Hashem set a time saying, 'Tomorrow Hashem will do this thing against the land.' Hashem did this thing the next day and He killed all the cattle of Egypt; from the cattle of B'nei Yisroel not one died.

As above, undoubtedly such advance warning had a purpose.

And now we come to מכת ברד. Here, too, there is an advanced warning but the nature of that advance warning is different from the two advance warnings that we have just learned.

We read (Ibid: P'sukim 18-21):

הִנְנִי מִמְטִיר כְּעַת מִחָר בְּרֹד כָּבֵד מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִיָּה כִּמְהוּ: בְּמִצְרַיִם לְמַן הַיּוֹם הַיּוֹסְדָה
וְעַד עֵתָהּ: וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הָעֵז אֶת מִקְנֶךָ וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה כָּל הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה

אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא בַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא יֵאָסֵף הַבַּיְתָה וְיֵרֵד עֲלֵהֶם הַבָּרָד וּמֵתוּ: הִיָּרָא אֶת דְּבַר ה' מֵעַבְדֵי
פְּרַעֲהוֹ הַנִּיֵּס אֶת עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת מִקְנֵהוּ אֶל הַבָּתִּים: וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׂם לְבֹ אֶל דְּבַר ה' וַיַּעֲזֹב
אֶת עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת מִקְנֵהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה:

‘Behold, at this time tomorrow I am raining down very heavy hail that there never was anything like it in Egypt from the day of its founding and until now. Now, send and in-gather your flocks and all that you have in the field; any people and animals that will be found in the field and will not be in-gathered into the house – the hail will come down upon them and they will die. Those who feared Hashem from the servants of Par’o chased his servants and his flocks into the houses. He who did not attend to the Word of Hashem left his servants and his flocks in the field.

This time an additional specification was added to the warning. Hashem decreed that it was insufficient to say ‘tomorrow’ without greater accuracy. The warning was given that it would be ‘this time tomorrow’. Rashi explains:

כעת מחר - שרט לו שריטה בכותל למחר כשתגיע חמה לכאן ירד הברד:

At this time tomorrow – Moshe made a mark on the wall and said, ‘tomorrow, when the sun will reach here to this mark, the hail will come down.’

Now, it is possible that we would think that in the same way Hashem introduced an advanced time-warning that would be continually effective, perhaps beginning with the plague of hail, Hashem was introducing a new pattern – specifying the specific time.

However, such a hypothesis is immediately dashed when we see the preamble to the following plague of ארבה, locusts, with which the following week’s Parshas Bo begins.

We read there (Perek 10/Posuk 4):

כִּי אִם מֵאֵן אֲתָה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת עַמִּי הַנְּנִי מִבְּיַד מִחַר אֲרֵבָה בְּגִבְלֶךָ:

‘Because if you refuse to send out My People, behold I will bring upon you locusts within your borders tomorrow.’

No specific time on the morrow was identified. Anytime on the morrow would be eligible for the newest of the plagues to take place.

Thus, the specified warning given regarding the plague of hail has only one other plague with which it shares that same distinction – מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת, the killing of the first-born.

We read further on in next week's Parshas Bo (Perek 11/P'sukim 4-5):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֹּה אָמַר ה' כְּחֻצַּת הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּמַּת כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכוֹר פְּרֹעָה הַיֵּשֶׁב עַל כִּסְאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשֹּׁפְחָה אֲשֶׁר אַחַר הָרְחִים וְכֹל בְּכוֹר
בְּהֵמָה:

Moshe said, 'So says G-d: At about midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt. Every first-born in Egypt will die, from the first-born of Par'o who sits on his throne to the first-born of the maidservant who is found in back of the millstone, and all the first-born of the animals.'

It is impossible to ignore the distinctiveness of מַכַּת בָּרָד, the plague of hail. Its partner is the plague of all plagues. And in fact, what may appear to be a distinction – a specific hour, midnight which is mentioned by מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת and absent from מַכַּת בָּרָד is easily explained.

Makkas B'choros occurred at midnight. However, since it was dark, there could be no specific indication of midnight. Thus, as Rashi explains, Moshe had to say 'at about midnight' so that Par'o's inexact timekeeping would not claim that the plague did not occur precisely at midnight.² In contrast, the time predicted of *Makkas Borod*, even though its specific hour was not told to us, was revealed exactly to Par'o because its onset had an observable mechanism which would occur when the sun would shine upon the marking on the wall.

And prior to seeking some resolution, let us add to our already significant list of questions a number of instances where Chazal seemingly hold varied and contradictory opinions.

We read in Midrash Sh'mos Rabba (Parshata 12/1):

² Rashi writes:

כַּחֲצַת הַלַּיְלָה – וּרְבוּתֵינוּ... שֶׁאִמְרַן מֹשֶׁה כַּחֲצוֹת, דְּמִשְׁמַע סוּמוֹךְ לוֹ אוֹ לִפְנֵי אוֹ לְאַחֲרָיו, וְלֹא אִמְרַן
בַּחֲצוֹת, שֶׁמֵּא יִטְעוּ אֲצִטְגִּינִי פְּרֹעָה, וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֹשֶׁה בְּדַאי הוּא:

At about midnight – Our Rabbis said that Moshe said 'at about midnight', implying near it, before or after, and he did not say '[precisely] at midnight' because Par'o's astrologers might err and they would say that Moshe is a liar.

...אתה מוצא במשה שהשגיב הקדוש ברוך הוא כחו ללכת בשליחותו ולעשות צויו,
והיה מורה לפרעה הרשע שיעשה תשובה שלא חפץ לשלוח המכה עד שיזהירונו
שיעשה תשובה...

You find regarding Moshe that Hashem raised his power to go on His mission and to command His commands. Moshe instructed the wicked Par'o to repent because He did not want to send His plague against Par'o until he would be warned and told to repent.

This Midrash teaches us that the outstretched Hand of Hashem, inviting mankind to return to him, was directed even towards Par'o! Even while HaKodosh Boruch Hu was hardening Par'os' heart, there was a place for him to repent and to be saved, him and his people.

At the same time, we read the Midrash's comments on one of the verses of מכת ברד that we are discussing. The Posuk reads (Perek 9/Posuk 16):

וְאוּלָּם בְּעִבּוֹר זֹאת הָעֲמֻדָּתִיךָ בְּעִבּוֹר הָרְאִתְךָ אֶת כְּחִי וְלִמְעַן סִפֵּר שְׁמִי בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ:

But for this purpose I Hashem have caused you to stand, in order to show you My strength and in order that you tell My Name in all of the land.

The Midrash writes (ibid Parshata 12/13):

אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא אי רשע סבור אתה שלא אוכל להכחידך מן העולם למוד ממכת הדבר בעת ששלחתי אותו הדבר אילו הייתי משלחו עליך ועל עמך היית נכחד מן הארץ אבל לא שלחתי עליך אלא כדי שאראך כח גבורתי ותספר כחי בכל הארץ, הדא הוא דתימא ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתך.

Hashem said to Par'o, 'Woe to the evil one. Do you think that I am unable to eliminate you from the world? Learn from the plague of pestilence when I sent it. Had I sent it upon you and your people, you would have been eliminated from the land. But I did not send it upon you in order that I will show you the power of My might and you will tell My power throughout the land.'

That is what it says, 'But for this purpose I Hashem have caused you to stand'.

There is no mercy expressed in this Midrash.

But in that very same Midrash Sh'mos Rabba (Parshata 11/3) we find G-d's mercy presented once again – and still in the context of מכת ברד.

We read:

ועתה שלח העז את מקנך בא וראה רחמיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא אפילו בשעת כעסו ריחם על הרשעים ועל בהמתם לפי שמכת הברד לא היה משלחו עליהן אלא על יבול הארץ והיה מזהירן שישמרו עצמן ואת בהמתם כדי שלא ילקו בברד,

And now send and in-gather your flocks – Come and see the mercies of HaKodosh Boruch Hu - even at the time of His anger He had mercy upon the wicked and upon their animals because with the plague of hail – He did not smite them with it, only the produce of the land and He warned them to guard themselves and their animals so that they would not be smitten by the hail.

And in *Pesikta Zutra* (Voera Perek 9/18) we find the opposite approach to the advance notice of the onset of the plague of hail. We read:

הנני ממטיר כעת מחר. זבדי בן לוי אמר סרט לו סריטה בכותל ואמר לו כשתגיע החמה עד כאן...כדי לסגפו ולענותו, הוא שאסור בישראל לענות את דינו, אבל במצריים כאשר היה פרעה מענה את ישראל, כך נתענה בכל מיני עינויים:

Behold I will rain upon you at this time tomorrow – Zavdi ben Levi said, 'Moshe made a scratch on the wall and said to Par'o, 'When the sun comes to this place tomorrow...' He did this to punish him and to afflict him. That is something that is forbidden for Beis Din to do to a Jew³. But to Egypt, they were afflicted with all types of afflictions just like Par'o afflicted Israel.

³ We read in Masseches Sanhedrin (Perek 4/Mishnah 1):

דיני נפשות גומרין בו ביום לזכות וביום שלאחריו לחובה לפיכך אין דנין לא בערב שבת ולא בערב יום טוב:

In cases of capital punishment, Beis Din can issue their decision on the first day of the trial if the decision is for acquittal. They cannot issue a decision for guilt until the next day. Therefore, Beis Din does not begin capital punishment cases on Erev Shabbos or Erev Yom Tov.

Bartenura explains:

לפיכך אין דנים לא בערב שבת - שנמצא גמר דינו בשבת, ולהשהותו אחר שבת אי אפשר מפני עינוי הדין, ולדון בו ביום אי אפשר שאין ארבע מיתות בית דין דוחין את השבת....

Not only would Par'o suffer from the plague itself and the destruction that it would bring upon him and his country, he would be agitated, worried and terrified for the full twenty-fours prior to the onset of the plague. That agitation, worry and terror were plagues in and of themselves.

There are additional sources as well that seem to express this dichotomy that we have documented. Are there differing opinions regarding our view of this particular plague of hail, opinions that are unalterably opposed to one another? Or is there some way, some consideration with integrity that will allow those paradoxical views to provide us with an overarching approach and provide us with a picture far broader than we have conceived until now?

Perhaps the following Midrash will provide us with an insight that will lead us to a solution and a new perspective.

We learn in Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba (Parshata 3/1):

אמר רבי יוחנן כתיב (איוב כה/ב⁴) עושה שלום במרומיו, הרקיע של מים והכוכבים של אש ואינן מזיקין זה לזה...אף במכות פרעה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא שלום, שנאמר ויהי ברד ואש מתלקחת בתוך הברד:

Rabi Yochanan said, 'It is written, "He makes peace in His heights". The heavens are made of water and the stars of fire and they do not damage one another.

With the plagues as well, Hashem made peace as it says, "There was hail and fire and fire ignited from the midst of the hail".'

What reason can we attempt to ascribe to the Ribbono Shel Olom for combining water and fire in order to create the plague of ברד? Was it only to demonstrate that His control was complete and encompassing or, in addition, was there a

Therefore, Beis Din does not begin capital punishment cases on Erev Shabbos – Because then it could be that the 'guilty' verdict would be given on Shabbos. To give the capital punishment after Shabbos cannot be done because of עינוי הדין, afflicting the verdict and to give him the capital punishment on Shabbos is impossible because Beis Din's capital punishments do not override Shabbos.

⁴ The entire verse reads:

הַמָּשָׁל וְפָחַד עִמּוֹ עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרְוֹמָיו:
Reign and fear are with Him, He makes peace in His heights.

particular message regarding these specific elements that Hashem combined to produce this seventh plague?

Water is the very substance of life. Water contributes greatly to the makeup of all people and much of the objects that inhabit the world.

Fire is the power of destruction. Within a short amount of time fire can eradicate places and people.

The two, water and fire, are truly opposites, not only in their physical capacities but in their symbolism as well.

What happens when Hashem rains down upon mankind these two symbols – one representing life and the other representing destruction and death?

When Hashem rains down upon mankind these two symbols He is presenting man with a choice. ‘Do you choose the power of life and humanity or do you choose death and destruction?’

But since these two powers, water and fire, life and death, are found together, bound in one unit, the message is even more profound.

If you choose life, not only will the water be life-giving, but fire, the nature of which is destruction, will use its formidable powers for life as well⁵. With fire you will build and cook, harnessing its abilities for your benefit.

If you choose death, not only will the fire be destructive and devastating, but water, the nature of which is life-giving, will use its formidable powers for death as well. Water can flood and transfer disease, harnessing its abilities for your detriment.

Had the water and fire descended separately then the one chosen would fulfil its potential and the other one would be dormant.

Now that the water and the fire are combined into one element, the ‘peace’ that they make can either enhance G-d’s blessings exponentially or bring out all that is negative in water as well as in fire.

⁵ See the commentary of Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch to the Posuk in Parshas Vayakhel (Sh’mos Perek 35/Posuk 3):

לא תבערו אש בכל משבתיכם ביום השבת:

Do not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the day of Shabbos.

Thus, we can understand the various Midrashim that seem to be in conflict but are not. Each Midrash brings a perspective from a different angle – and when combined, each passage from the Midrash presents us with a new way to view the choice.

And that is the reason for the specific time that was fixed for the morrow in *Makkas Borod*. The clock is; there is an opportunity to repent and a chance to continue in rebellion. When the clock stops ticking the opportunity for salvation has been lost.

But, we still need to raise another question. Why is this significant choice between water and fire, life and death presented to us in the context of *Makkas Borod*? Why is this seventh plague the appropriate venue for this choice to be presented to Israel?

I believe that the answer can be found in yet another Midrash, one that Rashi brings partially.

When the plague of hail was begun, the Torah describes it as follows (Perek 9/Posuk 22):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה אֶת יָדְךָ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיְהִי בָרָד בְּכֹל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל הָאָדָם וְעַל הַבְּהֵמָה וְעַל כָּל עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Extend your hand towards the heavens and there will be hail in the entire Land of Egypt, upon man and upon animal and upon all the grass in the field in the Land of Egypt.'

We translated the phrase:

נְטֵה אֶת יָדְךָ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם

Extend your hand towards the heavens.

But, even though that translation captures the gist of the verse, it wasn't literal. Hashem told Moshe: **עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם** which literally means 'above the heavens'. Rashi accepts our initial translation but, accepts the interpretation of the Midrash as well. He writes here:

עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם - לְצַד הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּמְדַרְשׁ אֲגָדָה הַגְּבִיּוֹת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמִשָּׁה לְמַעְלָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Towards the heavens – In the direction of the heavens. The Midrash explains that Hashem raised Moshe above the heavens’.

What does that Midrash teach us? What does that Midrash tell us that the Torah is teaching us here? Let us read the entire passage from Midrash Sh’mos Rabba (Parshata 12/3):

ויאמר ה' אל משה נטה את ירך על השמים ויהי ברד. הדא הוא דכתיב: כל אשר חפץ ה' עשה בשמים ובארץ בימים וכל תהומות (תהלים קלה/ו). אמר דוד: אף על פי שגזר הקדוש ברוך הוא: השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם (שם קטו/טז). למה הדבר דומה? למלך שגזר: בני רומי לא ירדו לסוריא ובני סוריא לא יעלו לרומי. כך כשברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו גזר ואמר: השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם. כשבקש ליתן את התורה בטל את הגזרה ראשונה ואמר: התחתונים יעלו לעליונים ועליונים ירדו לתחתונים ואני המתחיל: וירד ה' על הר סיני (שמות יט/כ⁶), ואל משה אמר עלה אל ה' (שם כד/א⁷), הוי: כל אשר חפץ ה' עשה בשמים ובארץ בימים וכל תהומות. כשבקש הקדוש ברוך הוא אמר: יקוו המים (בראשית א/ט⁸), ואחר כך כשבקש עשה היבשה ים ותהום, שנאמר: הקורא למי הים וישפכם על פני הארץ (עמוס ה/ט), ואומר: ביום הזה נבקעו כל מעינת תהום רבה (בראשית ז/יא⁹).

⁶ The entire verse reads:

וַיֵּרַד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי אֶל רֹאשׁ הַהָר וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה:
Hashem descended upon Mt. Sinai to the top of the mountain and He called to Moshe to come to the head of the mountain; Moshe ascended.

⁷ The entire verse reads:

וְאֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֵה אֵלַי ה' אֶתְּהָ וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרֶחֶק:
To Moshe He said, 'Ascend to Hashem, you, Aharon, Nodov and Avihu and seventy from the elders of Israel and you shall prostrate yourselves from a distance.

⁸ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים... לִיקוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאָה הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה וַיְהִי כֵן:
G-d said, 'Let the waters from below the heavens gather to one place and the dry land will be seen; it was so.

⁹ The entire verse reads:

בַּשָּׁנָה שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לַחַיִּי נֹחַ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּשִׁבְעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל מַעֲיֵנוֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וְאַרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתְּחוּ:
In the six hundredth year in Noach's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all of the springs of the great depths were fissured and the windows of the heavens opened.

וכשבקש עשה הים ותהומות יבשה, שנאמר: ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים (שמות יד/10), ואומר: ויוליכם בתהמות במדבר (תהלים קו/ט¹¹). וכן במצרים: משה שהיה בארץ נתן לו רשות לשלוט במעשה שמים, שנאמר: ויאמר ה' אל משה נטה את ידך על השמים.

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Extend your hand over the heavens and there will be hail - This is what written, 'All that Hashem desires He does in the heavens and in the earth, in the seas and in all of the depths'. Dovid HaMelech said, 'Even though that Hashem decreed that "The heavens – the heavens are for Hashem and He gave the land to man" [setting boundaries – nonetheless] 'whatever Hashem desires he did'.

To what is this comparable? To the King who decreed that Romans should not go to Syria and Syrians should not go to Rome. So it was when Hashem created His world He decreed and said, 'The heavens are for Hashem and He gave the land to man'. But, when He wanted to give the Torah, He nullified the initial decree and said, 'Those below shall come above and those above shall go below and I Hashem will be the first.' So it says, 'Hashem went down on Mt. Sinai' and it says, 'Hashem said to Moshe, "ascend".' That is, all that Hashem desires He did in the land and in the depths.

When HaKodosh Boruch Hu said, 'Let the waters gather' and then He sought to make the dry land, the sea and the depths as it says, 'He calls to the waters of the sea and He pours them out upon the land' and it says, 'On that day all of the springs of the great depths split open.

When He sought so, the sea and the depths turned into dry land as it says, 'B'nei Yisroel went on dry land in the midst of the sea' and it says, 'He led them in the depths in the wilderness.

¹⁰ The entire verse reads:

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַיַּבְשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַיָּמִים לָהֶם חֹמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם:
B'nei Yisroel went on the dry land through the midst of the sea and the water was their wall, from their right and from their left.

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיַּעַר בַּיָּם סוּף וַיִּחַרְבּ וַיִּלְיָכֶם בְּתַהֲמוֹת כַּמִּדְבָּר:
Hashem censured the Red Sea and it dried and He led them in the depths that were like a wilderness.

And so it was in Egypt: Moshe who was upon the land – Hashem gave him permission to rule in the works of the heavens as it say, ‘Hashem said to Moshe, “Stretch out your hand above the heavens”.’

It is G-d’s world, the Midrash says. The rules of nature that He makes are His to break. And in our particular case, Hashem raised one particular individual and gave him special control over the heavens.

When did that special elevation take place? At the onset of **מַכַּת בְּרַד**.

And what happened at *Makkas Borod*? Hashem allowed Moshe Rabbenu to abrogate another Divine rule of nature. The Divine rule of nature was that water and fire were opposites. They have antithetical properties that did not allow them to live together. But those antithetical properties were Divinely decreed. Hashem made them and He could suspend them or nullify them completely.

But, with *Makkas Borod* He raised Moshe over the heavens to perform that revocation.

If we want to understand why Moshe Rabbenu had to be raised above the heavens to perform that abrogation we have to look no farther than one of the first commentaries of Rashi in Chumash.

The verse (B’reishis Perek 1/Posuk 8) reads:

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרִקְיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי:

G-d called the firmament ‘heavens’; it was night, it was day, the second day.

From what is the word *shamayim* derived? Rashi offers a choice and one of those choices reads:

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרִקְיעַ שָׁמַיִם...אֵשׁ וּמַיִם, שֶׁעָרְבָן זֶה בְּזֶה וַעֲשָׂה מֵהֶם שָׁמַיִם:

G-d called the firmament ‘shamayim’ – [The word **שָׁמַיִם** is a contraction of] **אֵשׁ** and **מַיִם**; Hashem mixed them together and made from them *shamayim*.

By placing Moshe over the heavens he was able to take the uniqueness of **שָׁמַיִם**, the place where the opposing forces of water and fire harmonized, and extend that harmony to the unnatural hail that fell upon Egypt.

What message was given to Par'o with that *rain* of terror? Par'o was placed face to face with his own vulnerability and his pretentiousness of divinity was forcibly contradicted.

In this week's *Haftorah*, we read (Yechezkel Perek 29/Posuk 3) of Par'o's self-assessment:

דְּבַר וְאָמַרְתָּ כֹה אָמַר אֱ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' הַנִּגְנִי עָלֶיךָ פְּרַעַה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם הַתְנַיִם הַגְּדוֹל הַרְבֵּץ
בְּתוֹךְ יַאֲרִיו אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יַאֲרִי וְאֲנִי עָשִׂיתִנִּי:

Speak and say, 'So says G-d the Master, Hashem, "Behold I am upon you, Par'o, King of Egypt, the great serpent who crouches in the midst of his seas, he who said to Me, 'The sea is mine and I made it and myself'¹².

The immediate message of *Makkas Borod* to Par'o was that not only G-d is greater than him, Moshe Rabbenu now truly has the metaphysical powers which Par'o claimed to have and never did. Moshe is greater than Par'o as well.

The message of the plague of hail in which the rules of nature were suspended and given in the hand of a human being was a wake-up call for Par'o. The message was so strong and so powerful that it was an act of mercy. Par'o was given a stark reminder of his humanity and that reminder had the power to bring him humility and to recognize the strength of Hashem Whom the Posuk refers to as:

אֱ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

G-d the Master.

G-d, as the Master, chose to elevate Moshe; Par'o was not raised up at all.

On the other hand, the threat at the time of the plague of hail was more palpable than ever *davka* because Par'o was presented with such a blunt and uncompromising reminder.

And thus, *Makkas Borod*, beginning the final triad of the Ten Plagues, had a special place in the history of the Exodus. It had a unique profile and it had a unique message.

¹² See Radak here for the source of this translation.

And the type of message that *מכת ברד* presented to Par'o has relevance for us as well.

Whenever something uniquely out of the ordinary occurs we should be particularly drawn to its message.

If the event is uniquely positive then we must be aware that our attention is being called to the good that we receive, to the munificence of which we are the beneficiaries. If, G-d forbid, the event is uniquely negative then we are reminded that it is the Hand of G-d that delivers suffering as well.

In either case, we are called upon to recognize the Presence of G-d in our midst and be aware that a specific event could provide us with a watershed moment, allowing us to show our humility or ignoring the revelation which He provides; a revelation that may never repeat itself with the same impact.

A Jew is to be aware of the Hand of G-d that is in our midst. Truly, it is in our midst every day and all day.

But beyond the day-to-day pace, there are transcendent moments that cannot be ignored.

Makkas Borod poses the question to us – will we take to heart and heed the message of those moments of unmatched occurrences and experiences, taking them to heart and motivating ourselves to seek the Providence and the Guiding Hand of the true Master of the Universe.

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock