

פרשת בא

The time for the penultimate plague has arrived. Darkness descends upon all of Egypt but with the few details that the Torah chooses to reveal to us, we remain in the dark in attempting to understand that which occurred.

The plague itself and the ensuing dialogue that occurred between Par'o and Moshe and Aharon are clouded by the many questions that arise. Perhaps we can see some of those difficulties, shed some light on some of them and thereby have a greater grasp of the Plague of Darkness, its meaning and its implications.

We begin by viewing a few verses that introduce this ninth plague that we find in our Parshas Bo. We read (Sh'mos Perek 10/P'sukim 21-25):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה יָדְךָ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ: וַיֵּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים: לֹא רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְלֹא קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחַת יָדוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְלֹכֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם: וַיִּקְרָא פְרַעֲה אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת ה' רַק צֹאנְכֶם וּבְקֹרְכֶם יֵצֵג גַּם טַפְכֶם יִלְךְ עִמָּכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶתֶּה תִתֶּן בְּיַדְנוּ זְבָחִים וְעֹלֹת וְעֲשִׂינוּ לָהּ אֶ...לְקִינוּ:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand towards the heavens and it will be darkness upon the Land of Egypt and the darkness will be felt.' Moshe stretched out his hand towards the heavens and it was darkness of heavy clouds in all of the Land of Egypt for three days. No person saw his brother and no person arose from under him for three days; but for all of B'nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings. Par'o called to Moshe and he said, 'Go and serve Hashem; but your sheep and your cattle will stay; your children will also go with you.' Moshe said, 'You, too, will place in our hands offerings and burnt-offerings and we will do for Hashem our G-d.

We have already pointed out, in reference to *Makkas Borod*, the plague of hail, that the phrase

נְטֵה יָדְךָ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם:

which we translated as:

'Stretch out your hand towards the heavens

really means

‘stretch out your hand above the heavens’.

We will soon examine the meaning of that phrase in the context of *Makkas Choshech*, the plague of darkness.

And there is an additional question. What does the term:

וימש חושך

mean precisely?

We translated it as ‘darkness will be felt’. And that is in accord with many meforshim.

However, when I read *Targum Onkelos* I become bewildered. He writes:

ויהי חשוכא על ארעא דמצרים בתר דיעדי קבל ליליא:

There will be darkness over the Land of Egypt after the darkness of night is removed.

What possibly could *Onkelos* mean? The plague of darkness is to bring darkness, not to remove it?

And the difficulties continue.

In two successive P’sukim the Torah writes that the *Makkah* lasted for three days. Once we were told its duration, why should the length of the plague be repeated?

Furthermore, the conclusion of the Posuk that mentions the ‘three days’ for a second time reads:

וּלְכֹל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֵתָם:

For all of B’nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings.

Now, we are not surprised that this plague did not smite Israel. We have been told before regarding some of the *makkos* that Israel did not suffer from them.

However, the way that the Torah told us until now is different than that which is conveyed in this verse.

Regarding the Plague of *Arov* we read (Sh’mos Perek 8/Posuk 18):

וְהִפְלִיתִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן אֲשֶׁר עָמַד עָלֶיהָ לְבִלְתִּי הִיּוֹת שָׁם עֶרֶב לְמַעַן
תֵּדַע כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּקִרְבֵּי הָאָרֶץ:

I Hashem will distinguish on that day the *Land of Goshen* that My People stand upon it so that there will not be *Arov* in order that you shall know that I Hashem am in the midst of the land.

Regarding the Plague of Hail we read (ibid. Perek 9/Posuk 26):

רַק בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן אֲשֶׁר שָׁם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא הָיָה בָרָד:

Only in the Land of Goshen that B'nei Yisroel were there, there was no hail.

Why did the Torah choose to express itself differently regarding Israel's exemption from *Makkas Choshech*? Why did it not mention *Goshen* and say, in its place, בְּמוֹשְׁבוֹתָם?

And more; we read above:

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לָכֵן עֲבַדוּ אֶת ה' רַק צֹאנְכֶם וּבְקִרְכֶם יֵצֵא גַם טַפְכֶם יִלְךְ
עִמָּכֶם:

Par'o called to Moshe and he said, 'Go and serve Hashem; but your sheep and your cattle will stay; your children will also go with you.'

When did Par'o 'call' to Moshe? If he called to him during the days of darkness – how was that possible? The Egyptians could not see and then no one could even move.

If Par'o called to Moshe following the days of darkness, after the plague had concluded, then his conversation with Moshe Rabbenu was unprecedented.

In each instance when Par'o called to Moshe it was to seek respite from the plague that was smiting Egypt at that time in its fury. Par'o called to them to seek relief from his present suffering and from that of his people. If Par'o had to wait until the plague subsided – otherwise how would he have been able to contact Moshe - what was he seeking? The suffering had subsided.

And finally, for the time being, perhaps the most puzzling question of all. The final Posuk in the section that was brought above reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶתָּה תִּתֵּן בְּיַדְנוּ זְבָחִים וְעֹלֹת וְעֲשִׂינוּ לָהּ... לְקִיּוֹנוֹ:

Moshe said, 'You, too, will place in our hands offerings and burnt-offerings and we will do for Hashem our G-d.

We will let *Or HaChaim HaKodosh* express our incredulity for us. He writes:

גם אתה תתן בידנו. קשה איך שאול ישאל עבד ה' זבחי א...ל"קים מאיש בזוי וטמא
אשר הרים פיו בקדוש ישראל נוסף על היותו נכרי החפץ לה' (משלי טו/ח¹) בזבח
רשעים...

You, too, will place in our hands – This is difficult. How could the *Eved Hashem* – Moshe Rabbenu - make a strong request of offerings for G-d from this disgraceful and impure person – Par'o who raised his mouth against the Holy One of Israel, besides the fact that he was a non-Jew? 'The offerings of the wicked are abominations!'

There is much more to explore, but let us try to have a picture of what occurred regarding the Plague of Darkness, based on the questions that were raised².

Unquestionably *חושך*, *מכת חושך*, the plague of darkness was not a regular night that was particularly cloudy or lasted a long time.

When Onkelos tells us that the *plague* of darkness came about when the night ended and HaKodosh Boruch removed the natural darkness that comes at sunset and ends at dawn, he informed us that this plague's darkness was a new creation.

It is true that sometimes things are so dark that you literally cannot see your hand before your face. That is how Ibn Ezra explains the plague. He writes:

¹ The verse reads:

זָבַח רָשָׁעִים תּוֹעֵבַת ה' וּתְפִלַּת יְשָׁרִים רְצוֹנוֹ:

The offering of the wicked is an abomination of Hashem; the prayers of the upright are His Will.

See also Mishlei Perek 21/Posuk 27:

זָבַח רָשָׁעִים תּוֹעֵבָה אִף כִּי בְזָמָה יְבִיאֶנּוּ:

The offering of the wicked are an abomination; even when they bring it, it is plotting.

² In no way do we suppose that our presentation is the only possibility. However, in light of the questions that we have raised we hope that what we present here will be consonant with many of the explanations of Chazal and those of many of the meforshim.

והנה בים אוקינוס יבא חשך עב, שלא יוכל אדם להפריש בין יום ובין לילה, ויעמוד זה לפעמים חמשה ימים. ואני הייתי שם פעמים רבות:

Behold, in the ocean a very thick darkness comes in which a person cannot distinguish between day and night and that situation can continue sometimes for five days. And I was in such a situation many times.

And because such darkness is a natural phenomenon, Ibn Ezra explains that the inability for people to move was not due to the physicality of the darkness but to the effect that the total lack of visibility causes. He writes:

ולא קמו איש מתחתיו - מביתו, כמו שבו איש תחתיו כי אנה ילכו בלא אור:

A person did not arise from that which was under him – i.e from his home. This phrase is like what we find when Israel was told: Everyone should stay where that is underneath him [and that means – stay in your place] because where could they go without light?

However, the need for Hashem to raise Moshe above the heavens implies that Moshe was overcoming nature just as he did in the Plague of Hail when fire and water joined together to punish Egypt.

Nature, as Hashem created it from the very beginning of time was (B'reishis Perek 1/Posuk 5):

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר

There was night and there was day.

And the Posuk there tells us:

ויקרא לאור יום ולחושך קרא לילה

Hashem called the light 'day' and to the darkness He called 'night'.

That is from the very beginning of Creation Hashem instilled in nature the daily patterns with which we are so familiar.

But for this ninth plague, Hashem wanted to demonstrate one final time, prior to His freeing of Israel, His complete mastery over Creation. And, therefore, *davka* He allowed Moshe to make a *chiddush*, to temporarily overturn nature and, when

night ended, to introduce a form that appeared to be like night, but one that had a physicality to its dimension.

In this ninth plague, the darkness was not merely an absence of light. This darkness was a substance in and of its own, no different than any other substance in Creation.

And that substance gradually increased in strength over its first three days, the number of days mentioned the first time, and became even more substantial during the next three days, the number of days mentioned the second time in the Posuk that follows.

The darkness was felt – **וימש חושך** –

Regarding Par'o's call for Moshe in relationship to the Plague of Darkness, Targum Yonoson writes:

ובסוף תלתא יומין קרא פֿרעה למשה...

At the end of three days, Par'o called to Moshe.

It seems that Targum Yonoson holds that there were three days of darkness only, not six. And since there was no visibility at all during those days, and no movement either, Par'o's call to Moshe came only after the plague had reached its conclusion.

Such an approach leaves itself open to a major question. The previous times that Par'o called to Moshe, the reason for that call was to seek respite from his suffering and that of his people. It is therefore understandable that his promises, made time and time again, were merely a ruse. He was trying to trick Moshe Rabbenu. And even though Moshe Rabbenu wasn't tricked because Hashem had informed Moshe in advance that such would be Par'o's demeanor³, Par'o didn't know that and thought that he was outsmarting Moshe, and maybe Hashem as well.

³ At the Burning Bush Hashem told Moshe (Sh'mos Perek 3/Posuk 19)

ואני ידעתי כי לא יתן אתכם מלך מצרים להלך ולא ביד חזקה:

I know that the King of Egypt will not allow you to go, and not with a strong hand.

In last week's Parshas Voera we read (ibid. Perek 9/Posuk 30):

ואתה ועבדיך ידעתי כי טרם תיראון מפני ה' א...ל'קים:

Certainly such false promises only underscored Par'o's wickedness and justified Hashem hardening Par'o's heart and adding more and more punishments to him.

On the other hand, if Par'o only sought Moshe's mercy after the plague had concluded, then it would appear that there was a sea-change in Par'o's attitude. What would Par'o gain at this time from Moshe? There would have been no seeking of a relaxation or respite – the respite was already there. Perhaps, if such were the case that Par'o turned to Moshe after the plague's cessation, Par'o was showing signs of true repentance and thus would not have deserved the harsh Divine response that he received.

The fact that that this venue, when Moshe was called before Par'o at the Plague of Darkness, served as the venue for announcing the final plague of *מכת בכורות*, seems to imply that Par'o's evil was at its pinnacle and there was no choice but to deliver the final and most destructive punishment upon him and upon Egypt. If the plague had already ceased and *yet* Moshe was called before Par'o to eliminate further plagues, that would not seem like it was the pinnacle of evil.

Thus, we note the explanation of the Netziv. He writes:

ויקרא פרעה. הרב אבן עזרא כתב כי היה אחר שלשה ימים שראו אור, ואינו נראה, דאם כן למאי עשה כן, אלא בעצם שעת החושך, ושלה על ידי אנשי ישראל, שמאז שנעשו חשובים בעיניו כמו שכתוב לעיל פרק ט פסוק לה נעשו כמה אנשי ביתו, ומכל שכן בעת החשך המה שמשוהו, ושלה על ידם:

Par'o called – Rav Ibn Ezra wrote that this was after the three days when the Egyptians saw light⁴. That does not appear to be the *p'shat*. If that is the *p'shat*, why would Par'o do so?

But, [the *p'shat* is] that Par'o called for Moshe during the darkness and he sent Hebrews to do his bidding.

[He sent Hebrews to do his bidding] because since the Hebrews became important in the eyes of Par'o, as is written above⁵, they became like

You, Par'o, and your servants I know that not yet have you feared before G-d.

⁴ Ibn Ezra explains that the duration of the Plague of Darkness was 3 days, not 6.

⁵ See the Netziv's commentary there.

members of his household. And all the more so did they served him during the darkness and he used them as his messengers.

The availability of the Hebrews to do Par'o's bidding was invaluable during the days of darkness. Only the Hebrews were able to see; only they had light.

That is what we read earlier:

...וְלִכְלֹ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אוֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם:

For all of B'nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings.

We noted above that even though the exceptionality of Israel during the plagues was not unique during *Makkas Choshech*, the Torah's description of it is indeed exceptional.

Why did the Torah write here בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם, 'in their dwellings' and not בארץ גושן as it wrote in other instances?

The answer to this question may very well bring support to the Netziv's *chiddush* that Par'o sent for Moshe using his Hebrew attendants.

מוֹשְׁבֹתָם implies wherever they were⁶. Wherever the Hebrews were they had light. And thus by this change in its language the Torah is telling us that if Hebrews were ensconced in Par'o's palace, even while all of the Egyptians were fumbling about or frozen in their places, the Hebrews' movements were free and uneventful.

⁶ The Torah writes מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם, your dwellings, in a number of places. One example is Parshas Emor (Vayikro Perek 23/Posuk 3) where we read:

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ כֹּל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה שַׁבַּת
הוּא לָהּ בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֵי־תֵיכֶם:

Six days your work shall be done and on the seventh day it is a Shabbos of Shabbos, a holy convocation; you shall not do any work; it is Shabbos for Hashem in all of your dwelling places.

By writing מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם the Torah indicates that the observance of Shabbos is not limited to any one geographical location. Its Halachos apply everywhere.

By using the say term regarding the light that Israel had during the Egyptian's darkness, we are told that wherever they were, the Israelites had light.

But it is not only the nature of מַכַּת חוֹשֶׁךְ that we must explain. The meeting of Moshe and Aharon in Par'o's palace when Par'o called for them also raises many issues that we must attempt to understand.

Let us see some of those issues.

We read (Perek 10/P'sukim 28-29):

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ פַּרְעֹה לֵךְ מֵעַלִי הַשָּׁמֶר לְךָ אֶל תִּסָּף רְאוֹת פָּנַי כִּי בַיּוֹם רְאִיתְךָ פָּנַי תָּמוּת:
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן דַּבַּרְתָּ לֹא אֶסָּף עוֹד רְאוֹת פָּנַי:

Par'o said to Moshe, 'Go from me, guard yourself against continuing to see my face because on the day that you will see my face, you will die.'

Moshe said, "Thus you have spoken; I will not continue to see your face.'

Par'o was angered by Moshe's refusal to agree to the conditions Par'o set for Israel to go out of Egypt and he banished Moshe with a severe threat.

Moshe replied that Par'o's words would be fulfilled. They would never come face to face again.

However, the continuity of the events, as the Torah tells us, does not seem to bear out those words, the words of Par'o and the words of Moshe.

In the intervening verses, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct the people to borrow items from the Egyptians and then tells Moshe regarding the impending מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת, the killing of the first-born Egyptians.

It would have seemed apparent that this prophecy had to have occurred after Moshe departed the palace since we have seen before that Moshe's communication with Hashem did not take place within the impure environs of the Egyptian cities.

However, immediately following this revelation, Moshe again addresses Par'o. How could that have happened? Both Moshe and Par'o said that they would not see each other again.

Furthermore, following מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת, we read (Perek :

וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַם אַתֶּם גַּם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ
עֲבְדוּ אֶת ה' כְּדַבַּרְכֶּם:

Par'o called to Moshe that night and he said, 'Arise, go out from the midst of my people, also you and also B'nei Yisroel; go serve Hashem as you spoke'.

If Par'o broke his word and saw Moshe again, we are not bothered. This was not the first time that Par'o broke his word and, if he continued to live, it would probably not be the last time either.

On the other hand, Moshe affirmed Par'o's words. How could Moshe have seen Par'o when he, Moshe, said that he would not look at him again?

Netziv offers an interesting interpretation of Moshe's response to Par'o when he said:

לא אסף עוד

I will not continue anymore.

It would seem, Netziv says, that the word עוד, anymore, is superfluous. If Moshe said 'I will not continue' then עוד, 'anymore' is already implied.

However, Netziv reminds us that sometimes the word עוד is not synonymous with 'continue', i.e. repeating the same action again.

Sometimes עוד means repeating the same event *exactly* as it was until now.

Therefore he writes:

לא אסף עוד. הוסיף משה מלת עוד דמשמעו כמה פעמים כמו שהיה עד כה, כמו שפירשו במשנה שלהי סנהדרין (דברים יג/ז⁷) לא תבנה עוד כמו שהיתה כו', ואמר משה שלא יוסיף לראות באופן שהיה עד כה, כי מעתה יבא פרעה אליו:

I will not continue anymore – Moshe added the word עוד that has as an implication that 'I will not continue to see you 'many times' as it has been until now. That is how Chazal explained the Mishnah at the end of

⁷ The entire verse reads:

וְאֵת כָּל שְׁלָלָהּ תִּקְבְּץ אֶל תוֹךְ רְחוֹבָהּ וְשָׂרַפְתָּ בְּאֵשׁ אֶת הָעִיר וְאֵת כָּל שְׁלָלָהּ כְּלִיל לֵה' אֵי...לִיקִיָּה וְהִיָּתָה תֵּל עוֹלָם לֹא תִבְנֶה עוֹד:

And all of the spoils of the city you shall gather into its main street and you shall burn the city with fire and all of its spoils, completely; it is for Hashem your G-d; the city shall be an eternal hill; it shall not be built anymore.

Masseches Sanhedrin (111 b⁸) regarding the עיר הנדחת, the city that has to be destroyed because the majority of its inhabitants were idolaters.

There the Torah writes:

לא תבנה עוד

It should not be built 'anymore' and Chazal said, that the word עוד comes to teach that it cannot be built again 'as it was'.

Therefore, Moshe said עוד to say that in the way that he had seen Par'o until now, he will not see him again. [Until now, Moshe came to Par'o] and now Par'o will come to Moshe.⁹

However, Rashi does not accept the explanation of Netziv and therefore he teaches us that the Divine prophecy that Moshe received did not take place at a time and place other than Par'o's demand that Moshe not see Par'o ever again. Rashi writes:

בעמדו לפני פרעה נאמרה לו נבואה זזה שהרי משיצא מלפניו לא הוסיף ראות פניו:

When Moshe was standing before Par'o this prophecy [of B'nei Yisroel borrowing the items from the Egyptians and the killing of the first-born] was said. [It had to be so because] when Moshe went out from before Par'o, he never saw him again.

⁸ We read there:

רבי עקיבא אומר: לא תבנה עוד - לכמות שהיתה אינה נבנית, אבל נעשית היא גנות ופרדסים.
Rabbi Akiva says, 'It shall not be built again' – [It shall not be built to be the way that it was] but it can be made into gardens and orchards.

⁹ Ramban writes:

כי טעם ויקרא למשה ולאהרן, שהלך עד פתח ביתם וצעק בחשך קומו צאו מתוך עמי. או ששלח להם על ידי המצרים

The explanation of Par'o calling for Moshe and Aharon [following מכת בכורות] is that Par'o came to the door of their house and called out in the darkness, 'arise and go out from the midst of my people'.

Alternatively, he sent Egyptian messengers [but did not go himself].

Both explanations of Ramban state that, in fact, Par'o's voice was heard but he and Moshe never saw each other.

That is, when Moshe said that he would not see Par'o again, he was not reacting to Par'o. He informed Par'o, angrily, that he would not see him again.

It might seem that Moshe's words were reacting to Par'o's threat by the very way that Moshe speaks to Par'o regarding the aftermath of *מכת בכורות* that was to take place in the upcoming days. The Torah writes (Perek 11/Posuk 8):

וַיֵּרְדוּ כָּל עַבְדֵיךָ אֵלַי וְהִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לִי לֵאמֹר צֵא אֵתָהּ וְכָל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֶיךָ וְאַחֲרָי
כֵּן אֵצֶא וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרַעֲהַ בְּחָרִי אָף:

[Moshe said,] 'All of your servants – they will come down to me and bow before me saying, 'Go out, you and all of the people who are at your feet and then I will go out;' Moshe went out from before Par'o fuming.

But there is another reason for Moshe Rabbenu, the most of humble of mankind, to be angry. The door of Teshuva is never closed. Par'o could have had a change of heart the next time that Moshe Rabbenu would approach him. It may have appeared that Par'o was closing the door in Moshe's face. In reality, Par'o closed the door upon himself, denying himself the opportunity to have one more chance to change his ways.

And perhaps that is the *p'shat* of Moshe's seemingly strange words – that Par'o would also provide animals for to offer to HaKodosh Boruch Hu when Israel would leave Egypt to worship the Creator.

We saw the strong words of the *Or HaChaim HaKodosh*. Ramban, centuries before, raised the subject. He writes:

גַּם אֶתָּה תִּתֵּן בִּיְדֵינוּ זְבָחִים וְעוֹלוֹת - לֹא אָמַר מֹשֶׁה דָּבָר זֶה עַל מִנַּת לְהַעֲשׂוֹת, וְלֹא עָשָׂה כֵּן כִּלְלִי, אֲבָל הֵם דְּבָרֵי חִיזוּק. יֹאמַר כִּי תִכְבַּד מֵאֵד יָד ה' עֲלָיו וְעַל עַמּוֹ, עַד כִּי גַם זְבָחִים וְעוֹלוֹת וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעַד נַפְשׁוֹ. וּבִאֲמַת כִּי כֹאשֶׁר אָמַר לָהֶם (לְהֵלֵךְ יָב/לֵב¹⁰) וּבִרְכַתֶּם גַּם אוֹתִי, הִיָּה נוֹתֵן בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ כָּל מִקְנֵהוּ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו, אֲבָל לֹא עָלָה עַל דַּעַת מֹשֶׁה

¹⁰ The entire Posuk reads:

גַּם צֹאנֵיכֶם גַּם בְּקִרְכֶם קָחוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם וְלָכוּ וּבִרְכַתֶּם גַּם אוֹתִי:
Also your sheep, also your cattle take – like you spoke – and go; you should bless me as well.

לעשות זבח רשעים תועבה (משלי כא/כז¹¹), כי ה' חפץ דכאו, לא לכפר עליו, רק להענישו ולנער אותו ואת כל חילו בים.

Also you will place in our hands offerings and burnt-offerings – Moshe did not say this with the intent that it would be done [i.e. that he would offer Korbonos from the flocks of Par'o] and he did not do so at all [to offer Korbonos from Par'o's flocks].

Moshe said this to emphasize and strengthen his words.

He said [to Par'o] that the Hand of Hashem would weigh heavily upon Par'o and upon his people to such an extent that Par'o would give animals for offering and all that he had to save his own life.

And in fact, when Par'o said to Moshe [after בכורות] 'you should bless me as well' he would have given all of his flocks to atone for him.

But Moshe never thought to bring the offering of the wicked which is an abomination because Hashem wanted to beat him down, not to atone for him. Hashem wanted to punish Par'o and to shake up him and his army in the sea.

Nonetheless, had Par'o come to his senses, perhaps he could have saved himself and his people¹² and Moshe's fury was directed towards this unnecessary loss of

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

זָבַח רָשָׁעִים תּוֹעֵבָה אֶף כִּי בְזִמָּה יְבִיאֲנֻהוּ:

The offering of the wicked is an abomination; they will bring it as a plot.

¹² Support for this thesis can be received from the types of offerings that Moshe mentioned to Par'o – עולות וזבחים –

The Korbon Oloh is the burnt-offering. That is clear. What are *zevachim*?

Zevachim refers to other offerings, most like *Korbonos Sh'lomim* which are free-will, donated offerings.

In Masseches Menachos (73 b) we learn that non-Jews can bring Korbonos to the Beis HaMikdosh and specifics regarding what they can bring.

There is a dispute there if they can bring any type of free-will offering, which would include *Shlomim* or only bring a Korban Oloh.

life that Par'o's stubbornness was now going to cause with the advent of the killing of the first-born.

But together with the Divine Revelation regarding *מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת*, Hashem commanded Moshe regarding Israel's borrowing of the items from the Egyptians also at that time, in the context of the plague of darkness.

Why was that command given at that time specifically?

In order to answer that question, let us revisit the P'sukim of the plague of darkness and offer an interpretation that may summarize what we have attempted to learn.

We read:

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אַפְּלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים:
לֹא רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְלֹא קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחְתָּיו שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְלֹכַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה
אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם:

Moshe stretched out his hand towards the heavens and it was darkness of heavy clouds in all of the Land of Egypt for three days. No person saw his brother and no person arose from being underneath for three days; for all of B'nei Yisroel there was light in their dwellings.

During the plague of darkness, despite its terrifying effect, despite that the rules of nature were overturned, despite the fact that the night had ended and this new type of darkness was created, a substantive darkness, and invaded the world of the Egyptians – they, the Egyptians did not move. They remained frozen in their place. The Egyptians blocked out the revelatory light that the plagues brought as they revealed the Hand of G-d and His mastery. They would not change.

The Halachah is that they can only bring a Korban Oloh and therefore Moshe's statement regarding *Zevachim* is problematic. Even if he had no intention of ever taking and using Par'o's offerings, why would he mention something that was impossible according to the Halachah?

It may be that such was Moshe's wish: that ultimately Par'o would come to his senses, see the Hand of G-d that has mastery over all of Creation and be moved to such an extent that he would change his status to be able to offer *Shlomim*, not only the Oloh.

Despite all of that, the Egyptians remained in the dark!

Israel, though, had light. Israel was enlightened. Why was the command to borrow the items given in the context of the plague of darkness?

The Midrash Sh'mos Rabba (Parshata 14/3) writes:

ובשלשה ימי אפלה נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא חן העם בעיני מצרים והשאלום שהיה ישראל נכנס לתוך בתיהן של מצרים והיו רואין בהן כלי כסף וכלי זהב ושמלות, אם היו אומרים אין לנו להשאל לכם היו ישראל אומרים להן הרי הוא במקום פלוני, באותה שעה היו המצריים אומרים אם היו אלו רוצים לשקר בנו היו נוטלין אותן בימי החשך ולא היינו מרגישין שהרי ראו אותן כבר אחר שלא נגעו חוץ מדעתנו כמו כן לא יחזיקו והיו משאילין להן.

During the three days of darkness, Hashem gave the Israelites favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and they lent them [the various items].

The Israelites would enter the Egyptian houses [during the Days of Darknes] and would see silver and golden vessels and clothing.

[After the days of darkness] if the Egyptians would say, 'we have nothing to lend to you', the Israelites would say, 'you do have something and it is in this and that place'.

At that moment the Egyptians said, 'If the Israelites had wanted to cheat us they would have taken the items during the days of darkness and we would not have known. They saw the items before and they would not touch them without our permission!'

And so the Egyptians did not hold onto the articles but they lent them.

As we stand at the threshold of the Exodus, as we stand at the initiation of the Children of Israel becoming the People of Israel, we know that Hashem brought darkness upon the Egyptians and gave light to Israel.

But now we have learned an additional lesson. The Egyptians brought darkness upon themselves and our ancestors created light for themselves with their exemplary demeanor.

As we await the *Geula Shleima* and see so much darkness that surrounds us, we can be inspired by our ancestors, oppressed and demeaned slaves who made certain that the light would not be extinguished.

May we find that light and illuminate our lives, individually and nationally for our own Exodus from Exile to Redemption.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock