



# TORAT HAR SHIMUEL



## PARSHA

Rabbi Warren Katszel

### HASHEM'S PLACE IN THE NATURAL PROCESS

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The main purpose of the ten plagues was to demonstrate to Pharaoh and by extension the entire nation of Egypt that G-d created the world, is the author of the natural process and remains the active “conductor of the symphony” regarding the everyday happenings of the world in which we live. Hashem’s ongoing, active role is evident in everything from what direction human history (especially that of the Jewish People), will take, to how every blade of grass sprouts.

This concept manifests itself in one particular plague in a manner that raises a huge question regarding the Rashi that is associated with it. The plague of hail is introduced to us in a very unique way. G-d declares (Shemos 9:14) that He’s going to unleash “all of His wonders” against Egypt through this plague, an introduction that we do not see in any plague previous to this. Rashi comments on the words “es kol magayfosy” – “All of My wonders” – a statement that has been the focus of two questions. He says, “From here we learn that the plague of the killing of the firstborn outweighs the (previous) nine combined”. On this we can ask why is Rashi’s statement regarding the killing of the firstborn made here and from where does he conclude that, indeed, this tenth plague outweighs the other nine combined?

I offer the following as a possible answer to both of these questions. The first six plagues were exaggerations of the natural process – teva. Frogs, lice, pestilence, boils and the wild animals were brought upon the Egyptians in overwhelming numbers and intensity, but all within the framework of the natural process. Even blood, which is over ninety percent water, can be transformed by Hashem into blood with a few minor additions made by G-d Himself.

The first exception to this rule is the plague of hail, which brings with it a contradiction in the natural process. The Torah (Shemos 9:24) expresses, “So there was hail, and fire flashing within the hail”. Rashi comments on these words, “A miracle

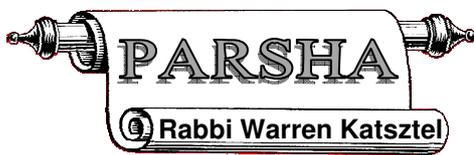
within a miracle. The fire and hail were mixed together, even though the hail is water. To do the will of the Creator, they made peace between them”.

How are we to understand this? What we have here is a supernatural manifestation of Hashem’s total control of the universe He created within the framework of the natural process. He provided within the framework of two natural elements – the temporary coexistence of fire and water – a contradiction that could only be attributed to Hashem’s infinite power and control.

We need to understand how the “above the natural process” (“L’ma’ale min ha’teva) concept is shared between the plague of hail and the killing of the firstborn. If today’s finest pathologists were to autopsy every firstborn that died in Egypt, they would come up with absolutely no cause of death. They would have to conclude that perfectly healthy people died for no other reason than it was Hashem’s will. This was absolutely necessary, for if there was a disease or malady the Egyptians could attribute this plague to, they would have been the first to say it was the disease that killed them and *not* Hashem. Therefore, what marks the uniqueness of this plague is that, unlike plagues one through nine, there was *no* physical element associated with it. It was a spiritual manifestation – totally above the natural, physical process – of Hashem’s strength and control over the universe He created. The fact that this plague was totally spiritual, lacking any physical component like the nine before this is the reason Rashi declares that the killing of the firstborn outweighs the other nine combined.

Why does Rashi make this tenth plague declaration during Hashem’s introduction of the plague of hail? It is because both of these plagues share the “above the natural process” element. This connection only occurs between hail and the killing of the firstborn and not with any other plague. Rashi teaches us this by identifying the power of the tenth plague here rather than during the tenth plague. Rashi’s literary style is to be highly commended because the greatness of anything is appreciated more when contrasted with something else than when it stands alone.

So what application does this have to modern day secularism lived in the diaspora? There are two themes presented in the Torah that everyone should give serious consideration to. The



first is expressed by many of the commentaries in Sefer Bereshis, declaring that the events of our Patri-

archs foretell how Jewish history will unfold. ("Ma'ase Avos, siman l'bonim".) The second theme is presented during the ten plagues and clearly describes G-d's goals in bringing the plagues upon Egypt. Three separate statements comprise the message Hashem is delivering to Pharaoh and Egypt in a clear precise manner, statements that make up a "101 course" in the Philosophy of G-d.

The first statement (Shemos 8:6) simply states, "There is none like G-d, our L-rd". Hashem's uniqueness is different than the human understanding of uniqueness. L'havdil, as an example, the Mona Lisa is regarded as one of the most famous paintings in the history of art. Although it is unique, there are thousands of copies floating around the world. G-d's uniqueness has zero potential for replication, so when Moshe expresses that there is none like Hashem, he is saying that the uniqueness of Hashem is indeed, unable to be duplicated by mankind.

The second phrase (Shemos 8:18) takes this a step higher and states, "I am G-d in the midst of the land". This G-d of the Hebrews, totally spiritual, is not confined to the spiritual heavens. Not only did He author the natural process and create the world of physicality, but retains complete control over it. What Moshe is telling Pharaoh is that Hashem's influence and control over our world is ongoing. Don't think that His exclusive place is in the heavens, divorced from the historical process. Man does not control how history unfolds. Hashem does!!

The third statement (Shemos 9:29), which is part of the plague of hail described above, takes this understanding to the highest level in declaring "That to G-d is all the earth". Pharaoh, through the idols of Egypt, is willing to acknowledge that the potential for spirituality exists within the physical world. What he needs to learn is that all spirituality has only One source, One reality, that being the G-d of Israel. The idols of Egypt have no impact on what occurs in this world, only Hashem does. Hashem authored nature, controls nature and alters it as He pleases. This was clearly demonstrated during the killing of the first born when all the idols of Egypt were destroyed by Hashem Himself.

What is the parallel that we must be aware of between ancient Egypt and modern day America? Our Sages teach that as many as eighty percent of the Israelite population passed away during the plague of darkness because they were not worthy of redemption. They sank to a level of no return within a spiritual abyss that disqualified them for redemption. Children of Avrohom, Yitzchak and Yaakov were lost!! What confirmed that they were beyond saving is the fact that during the first eight plagues they were incapable of being moved to the necessary point of belief in the forthcoming redemption, rendering them worthy of being included in the Exodus. I question what they were thinking? How could they witness what was going on and not acknowledge that the plagues came from Hashem's infinite strength and control?? The presence of Moshe and Aharon was a great advantage to the Israelite population, as they were a prophetic guide regarding what was occurring. There was no guess work

involved or any need to speculate about what was occurring! How the facts were to be interpreted was provided in a clear and precise manner.

So why in fact did they die? (Rov Zelig Privalsky shared this thought with me.) Rashi explains (Shemos 10:22) that after everything they witnessed, they simply did not want to leave Egypt. Rashi derives this from the Midrash, Shemos Rabba (14:3) and explains that their comfort was founded on the fact that a good number of them had risen to positions of power. The Rosh asks a great question on this. Dason and Avirom were famous for being contrary sinful individuals. Why were they worthy of leaving Egypt? He answers that despite their sinful character, they never gave up on the promise that the Israelites would be redeemed. That one factor, belief in the redemption, was the determining factor regarding who would live beyond the darkness and who die within it.

If, indeed, these events foretell Jewish history and if the final redemption, what we refer to as the Messianic Era is near at hand, what can we anticipate for the Jewish people living around the world today? Will we lose the same eighty percent lost during the plague of darkness? What merits will we be able to lay claim to justifying that Hashem allow us to participate in an event that our people have believed will occur since the destruction of the second Holy Temple nearly two thousand years ago? How many of our own will side with Hashem, His Torah and our national Messianic destiny over science and secularism? What will be the consequences for those who fail to choose properly? I don't claim to have the authoritative answer to these questions. There is, though, one reality I would like to shine a light on. The concept of organized Kiruv, drawing the unaffiliated into the study and observance of Torah, Mitzvos and Ma'asim Tovim is relatively new. It's less than seventy years old. Picture this!! Our Moshiach arrives having a major impact on our people and the entire world. Every Jew no matter how far removed from Torah they may be will desire to join in this monumental event. When asked why they distanced themselves before they may legitimately be able to say that they were raised in homes with no Torah orientation. The response to them will be that despite their upbringing, Kiruv organizations were available to fill that vacuum. They will have to answer for that spark within that although there, remained dormant, never ignited.

We have a role here also. We must recognize that we represent something very unique, remarkably dynamic. People watch us and if we make the right impression, if we extend a hand we can draw them closer to what is their source as much as it is ours – Hashem Yisborach and His Torah. The time until the Geulah is hopefully short, and the work is very great. Get involved!!

