

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XIV: Va'era (Ex. 6:2–9:35)

Essay 15. The fifth and seventh plagues: pestilence and hail

פסוק "ועתה שלח העז את־מקנהך" וכו'. הקשו המפרשים למה לא הזהיר משה במכת הדבר כמו שהזהיר בכאן במכת הדבר, לומר להם "ועתה שלח העז את־מקנהך".

There is a **verse** concerning the seventh plague of hail: **“Now therefore send, bring to refuge your animals** and all that you have in the field; for every man and beast that shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die” (Ex. 9:19). **The commentators asked why Moses had not warned for the fifth plague of pestilence of livestock as he warned here of the seventh plague of hail, saying to them, “Now therefore send, bring to refuge your animals.”**

ולפי מה שפרש רש"י על הפסוק "ויהי שחין" וכו' "באדם ובבהמה", ואם תאמר מאין היו להם בהמות, והלא כבר נאמר "ויקח כל מקנה מצרים"? ותירץ לא נגזרה גזירה אלא על אותם שבשדות, והלא את דבר ה' ה[כ]נים את מקנהו אל הבתים. אם כן לא היה צריך להזהיר אפילו בפרד מאחר שראה שכבר עשו מעצמם בדבר.

According to what Rashi explained on the verse describing the sixth plague, “So they took soot of the kiln and appeared before Pharaoh; Moses threw it toward the sky, **and there was an inflammation** of boils breaking out in boils **on man and beast**” (Ex. 9:10): **“If you say, ‘Where did they obtain these animals?’ for hasn’t it already been said, ‘and all the livestock of Egypt died’** (Ex. 9:6) [i.e., from the fifth plague]? **The solution is that this** [fifth plague, the pestilence of livestock] **was only decreed upon those** [animals] **that were in the fields, and those who feared the word of the L-rd had brought their livestock to their houses.**” That is, G-d commanded Moses to warn Pharaoh, “If you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, then the hand of the L-rd will strike your livestock in the fields—the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep—with a very severe pestilence” (Ex. 9:2–3). It was clearly stated that the decree was only upon the animals in the field, and many Egyptians paid heed and brought the animals inside.

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If so, it wasn't necessary for Moses to warn them even for the seventh plague of hail, after he saw that they already acted on their own to protect their animals from the fifth plague, the pestilence of livestock, even without having been warned about it by Moses.

וַיִּבְנוּ בִמְהָ שְׂפָתַי הַזֹּהֶר דָּבָר וּבָרָד, אֵינֹן אֶתְנֹן מִמֶּשׁ. וְדָבָר, אֶהְדָּר בָּרָד. מִה בֵּין הָאֵי לְהָאֵי? אֵלֶּא דָּא בְּנִיחֻתָּא, וְדָא בְּתִקְיָפוּ דְּרוּגְזָא. עכ"ל. וְאַף אֲנִי נֶאֱמַר שְׂבִשְׁלָמָא בְּמַכַּת הַדָּבָר חֲשַׁבּוּ הַמִּצְרִיִּים לְהַמְלִיט מִן הַמֶּכָּה אִם הָיוּ מְכַנִּיסִים הַמִּקְנֵה לְבָתִּים, לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ יוֹדְעִים שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה כָּל כּוֹף דִּין וְרוּגְזוֹ. וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי הַכְּנִיסוּם, אֲבָל בְּבָרָד שֶׁהָיָה בְּרוּגְזוֹ וְדִין שְׂמָא לֹא יְכַנִּיסוּם בְּחֻשְׁבָּם שֶׁאֵין תִּקְנָה לְהַמְלִיט מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ שֶׁל הַקֵּב"ה. וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי הִזְהִירָם "שְׁלַח הֲעֵז" וְכו' שֶׁאִם יְכַנִּיסוּם יִהְיוּ נִמְלָטִים.

This question of why Moses had to warn for the seventh plague, hail, will be understood by what the Zohar wrote [about] pestilence [דָּבָר] [*dever*] and hail [בָּרָד] [*barad*] (parshat Va'era, page 31b): “After the Egyptians didn’t repent, the exact same letters [i.e., the words *dever* and *barad* each have the same three letters: *bet*, *dalet*, and *resh*] returned and killed all of the animals that remained, and pestilence [דָּבָר] turned to hail [בָּרָד]. What is the difference between this and that? This [the pestilence] is an easy [death], and that [the hail] is a violent assault.” We are also told that granted, with the plague of pestilence, the Egyptians thought to escape from the plague if they brought the animals into the houses, as they knew there with the pestilence there was not so much violence. Because of this, they brought them in to their houses for the pestilence, but for the hail, that was a violent assault, perhaps they didn’t bring them in, with their thinking being that there was no remedy to escape from the fiery wrath of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Before warning them to bring the animals indoors, Moses had said, “This time tomorrow I will rain down a very heavy hail, such as has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now” (Ex. 9:18). Perhaps they would have thought that the hail would even destroy their houses. Because of this, in order to have compassion upon them, [Moses] warned them “send, bring to refuge your animals,” that if they would bring them in to their houses, they would escape, i.e., that the houses would not be destroyed by the hail.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתְבוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים שֶׁהָיָה רוּצָה הַקֵּב"ה שִׁיְהִיו לָהֶם בְּהֵמוֹת לְרִדּוֹף אַחֲרֵיהֶם בָּיִם. אֵי נָמִי הָאֵי דְאָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה "שְׁלַח הֲעֵז" לֹא הָיָה לְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם, אֲלֵא אֶדְרָבָא לְרַעְתָּם כְּדִי שִׁיְהִיו לָהֶם בְּהֵמוֹת לְרִדּוֹף אוֹתָם בָּיִם, שֶׁאִם לֹא הָיוּ לָהֶם בְּהֵמוֹת אֲפֻשָּׁר שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ רוֹדְפִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם. וְנָהוּ הַתּוֹקֵף וְהַרוּגֵז שֶׁהָיָה בְּמַכַּת בָּרָד, אֲבָל בְּמַכַּת הַדָּבָר שֶׁהָיָה בְּנִיחֻתָּא, לֹא אָמַר לָהֶם "שְׁלַח הֲעֵז אֶת־מִקְנֶךָ".

As the commentators wrote, the Holy One, Blessed be He, had wanted [the Egyptians] to have animals in order to chase after [the Israelites], into the Reed Sea.^{1,2} It is as if Moses said to [Pharaoh], “send, bring to refuge your animals,” not to have compassion upon them, but rather to the contrary to make it worse for them, again, in order that they would have

¹ Grammatically, the Hebrew text is a sentence fragment that should be a continuation of the previous sentence, but thematically, the previous text suggested a compassionate approach, while this clause and the following sentence suggest strict judgment. Thus, the translator has moved the clause to this new paragraph, and has amended the English translation slightly to fit.

² Rabbi Moshe Alshich (“the Alshich haKadosh”) (1508–1593), comments on Ex. 9:19, “He warned them so that the horses would be saved, for they would be instrumental for the revenge against Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds.”

animals to chase [the Israelites] into the Reed Sea. For if they had not had animals, it's possible that they wouldn't have chased after [the Israelites], and wouldn't have drowned.

This explains Moses' warning for the violent assault of the plague of hail, but regarding the plague of pestilence, which was an easy [death], and for which the Egyptians of their own initiative had taken action to mitigate the harm, by bringing the animals indoors, [Moses] did not say to them, "send, bring to refuge your animals."

ועוד בדרך אחרת דאיתא במדרש ילקוט דבר מפני מה בא עליהם? לפי ששמו את ישראל רועי בהמות שלהם, לפיכך הביא עליהם דבר ונהרג כל מה שרעו ישראל. בדרך מפני מה הביא עליהם? לפי ששמו את ישראל נוטעי גנות ופרדסים, לפיכך הביא עליהם בדרך ונשבר כל מה שנטעו ישראל.

Also, another way to understand this question of why Moses warned Pharaoh regarding the seventh plague but not the fifth plague is brought in the midrash Yalkut (Shimoni, Va'era, remez 182:3): "Why did pestilence come upon them? Because they placed Israel as shepherds of their animals; therefore [G-d] brought upon them pestilence and killed all that Israel shepherded. Why did hail come upon them? Because they made Israel plant gardens and parks; therefore [G-d] brought hail upon them and He broke all that Israel had planted."

ואם כן דוקא במכת הברד שלא היתה אלא בשביל הנטיעות אמר לו "שלח העז" וכו' כדי שיכירו היטב טעם המכה. אבל במכת הדבר שאדברא היתה הכוונה להמית הבהמות, לא יתכן לומר לו "שלח העז", ועוד שאם היתה אומר לו זה במכת הדבר והיו פרעה ועבדיו שומעים להכניס המקנה לבית, אם כן, המכה לא היתה עושה כלום, אבל בברד אף אם היו שומעים לו, עם כל זה המכה היתה משפרת הנטיעות.

If so, precisely with the plague of hail, that was only brought because of the planting, [G-d] said to them, through Moses, "send, bring to refuge your animals," in order that they would well recognize the reason for the plague, that is, not to hurt the animals, but to destroy the plantings of the Israelites.

But for the fifth plague of pestilence, which to the contrary was intended to kill the animals, it was not possible to tell [Pharaoh], "send, bring to refuge your animals." That is, if He had said this to him for the plague of pestilence, and Pharaoh and his servants had listened and brought in their animals indoors, if so, the plague would have accomplished nothing! But with hail, even if they had listened to him, and brought in the animals, with all this the plague would have broken the plantings, which was the reason for the seventh plague according to the Yalkut Shimoni.

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