

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XIV: Va'era (Ex. 6:2–9:35)

Essay 16. The false divinity of Pharaoh

פסוק "וְרַב מְהִיֵּת קִלְתֵּי אֱלֹהִים וּבָרָד". קִשָּׁה לְמָה אָמַר "קִלְתֵּי אֱלֹהִים" הִנֵּה לוֹ לומר "קולות וברד" כְּמוֹ שְׁאָמַר "וַיִּתְדָלוּ הַקִּלּוֹת וְהַבָּרָד".

Regarding the seventh plague, there is a verse in which Pharaoh told Moses: “Plead with the L-rd **that there may be an end of the thunder of G-d and of hail**; I will let you go; you need stay no longer.”¹ A question is why does it say “**the thunder of G-d**”? It should have said “**the thunder and the hail** of G-d,” as it said in the later verse, “Leaving Pharaoh, Moses went outside the city and spread out his hands to the L-rd; **the thunder and the hail ceased**, and no rain came pouring down upon the earth.”² I.e., both the thunder and the hail were from G-d, so why in the first instance does it refer to the thunder of G-d, and then separately mention hail?

אָבֵל בָּא לְהוֹכִיחַ שְׁעָקָר דְּאִגְתּוֹ הִיָּתָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵם קוֹלוֹת אֱלֹהִים. וְזֶהוּ הַטַּעַם שֶׁבְּמִכָּה זֶה אָמַר "חֲטָאתִי הַפְּעַם ה' הַצַּדִּיק וְאֲנִי וְעַמִּי הָרָשָׁעִים" מֵה שְׁאִין כֵּן בְּשׁוֹם מִכָּה אֶחָרָת. שֶׁהֵנָּה פִּרְעֹה הִנֵּה עוֹשֶׂה עֲצָמוֹ אֱלֹהִים מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנִּילֹס הִנֵּה עוֹלָה לְקִרְאָתוֹ אֶחָר בְּרַפְת יַעֲקֹב, וְכִשְׁשָׁמַע קוֹלוֹת וּבָרָד שֶׁהֵיוּ מוֹכִיחִים שֶׁיֵּשׁ אֱלֹהִים בְּשָׂמִים וְהֵם "קוֹלוֹת אֱלֹהִים" הִנֵּה קִשָּׁה לוֹ מְאֹד.

This comes to prove that [Pharaoh’s] main concern was because [the sounds] were “the thunder of G-d,” literally, “the voices of G-d.” **This is the reason that for this seventh plague of thunder and hail, he said, “I stand guilty this time; the L-rd is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong,”**³ something that isn’t the case for any other plague, not the six earlier plagues or the three later plagues.

Pharaoh had made himself into a god, holding himself as such to others, and believing it himself, **because the waters of the Nile had risen at his approach after the blessing from**

* English translation: Copyright © 2023 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ Ex. 9:28.

² Ex. 9:38.

³ Ex. 9:27.

Jacob.⁴ When he heard thunder and hail that proved that there was a G-d in Heaven, and they were the “voices of G-d,” it was very difficult for him, to realize that he was not a god.

וְהָשִׁיב לוֹ מֹשֶׁה "הַקּוֹלוֹת יִתְדַלְּוּ" וְכֹי' "לְמַעַן תִּדְעַי כִּי לֹא הָאֱלֹהִים" וְאִינֶה אֱלֹהִים. אֲבָל יִדְעֵתִי שְׂאֵף בְּזֶה לֹא תָשׁוּב מִגְּאֻנְתִּי וְעוֹד תַּעֲשֶׂה עֲצָמָה אֱלֹהִים. "וְאַתָּה וְעַבְדֶּיךָ יִדְעֵתִי כִּי טָרָם תִּירָאוּן מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהִים", וְכֹן הִיָּה שְׂפֹאֲשֵׁר "וַיִּרְא פְּרִיעָה כִּי־תִדְל" וְכֹי' "וַיִּסָּף לְחֹטֵא", חֲזַר לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲצָמוֹ אֱלֹהִים, וְאַחַר כֵּן "וַיִּכְבֵּד לְבוֹ" עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאַפְשָׁר נָמִי שְׂפֹאֲשֵׁר אָמַר לוֹ "כִּי בַפֶּעַם הַזֹּאת אֲנִי שֹׁלֵחַ אֶת־כָּל־מַגְפָּתֵי אֶל־לְבָבְךָ", הַכְּנוּנָה הַיְתֵמָה כִּי זֶה תִּהְיֶה בְּלִבּוֹ מִכָּה עֲצוּמָה שְׁיִנְדַע לְכֹל שְׂאִינוֹ אֱלֹהִים.

Moses replied to him, “As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the L-rd, **the thunder will cease and the hail will fall no more, so that you may know that the earth is the L-rd’s.**”⁵ **But I know that even with this, you won’t abandon your haughtiness, and you will again make yourself into a god. “But I know that you and your servants do not yet fear the L-rd G-d.”**⁶

So it was, that when “Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again”⁷—[i.e.,] he went back to making himself a god, and afterward—“he hardened his heart”⁸ against Israel.

It’s also possible that when he said to him, “for this time I will send all My plagues unto your heart,”⁹ the intent in specifically using the word “heart” was that this would be a huge blow to his heart: that it would be known to everyone that he was not divine.

* * *

⁴ Gen. 47:10 reads “Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and left Pharaoh’s presence.” Rashi, based on Tanchuma Yashan 4:2:26, writes: “What was the blessing with which he blessed him? That the waters of the Nile might rise at his approach, because Egypt does not drink [i.e., is not irrigated by] rainwater, but the waters of the Nile rise and irrigate it. And from the time when Jacob blessed him and henceforth, whenever Pharaoh came to the Nile it rose at his coming, overflowed its banks and watered the land.”

⁵ Ex. 9:29.

⁶ Ex. 9:30.

⁷ Ex. 9:34.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ex. 9:14.