



Parashat Vaeira 5766

Our parasha deals with seven out of the ten makkot dealt to Pharaoh and Mitzrayim. When we look at the structure of the makkot, a very interesting pattern is revealed. In preparation for the makkah of dam, HaKadosh Baruch Hu commands Moshe to wait for Pharaoh early in the morning on the bank of the Nile, where Pharaoh would go every morning. In preparation for the makkah of tzfarde'a, HaKadosh Baruch Hu commands Moshe to approach Pharaoh in his palace to alert him to the next makkah. For the third makkah, kinnim, HaKadosh Baruch Hu commands Moshe to carry out the makkah without even warning Pharaoh. The Maharal explains that this pattern is meant to show how Moshe gained control over Pharaoh. First, he treated Pharaoh with respect, arising early in the morning to wait for him on the bank of the Nile. For the next makkah, he approached Pharaoh rather than waiting for him. For the third makkah, he struck without warning.

The difficulty with the Maharal's explanation is that it does not explain why the pattern repeats itself for the next two sets of makkot: 1) in preparation for the makkah of arov, Hashem again commands Moshe to wait for Pharaoh early in the morning on the bank of the Nile; in preparation for the makkah of dever, Hashem commands Moshe to again approach Pharaoh in the palace; and for the makkah of sh'chin, the third in the set, there is again no warning. 2) In preparation for the makkah of barad, Hashem commands Moshe to wait for Pharaoh on the bank of the Nile early in the morning; in preparation for the makkah of arbeh, Hashem commands Moshe to go to the palace; and for the makkah of choshech, Moshe again strikes without warning. What exactly is the message underlying the clear pattern and its repetition?

The explanation is that HaKadosh Baruch Hu essentially wished to respond to Pharaoh's statement to Moshe and Aharon, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him?" (Shemot 5:2). The first set of makkot demonstrate that there is a Creator. Dam's significance is that eliminates Pharaoh's belief that he is a god by preventing him from seeing his reflection in the Nile every morning as he used to and holding the impression that he stands above the Nile, a god of Mitzrayim. By tzfarde'a, an interesting conversation transpires. Pharaoh, in tremendous pain, calls Moshe to remove the tzfarde'a. Moshe responds with a very strange question: "When?" Obviously Pharaoh would want to end the pain immediately, or he would have waited to call you in! Pharaoh's response is even stranger: "Tomorrow." What is the real meaning behind this conversation?

Moshe says to Pharaoh: "You can talk to Hashem today and ask Him to influence tomorrow, unlike the other gods/forces that can influence nature today only, with no influence on the future. Do you want to see this in action?" Pharaoh, despite his pain, does not believe it and demands to see it in action, so he asks Moshe to pray now for the removal of the makkah tomorrow. This is what we say in davening: "Shiru lashem kol ha'aretz, basru miyom l'yom yeshuato (you can daven to Hashem today to bring redemption tomorrow)." For the rest of the world, this is a chiddush. But for Am Yisrael, this is no

chiddush. Therefore we ask that “hamelech ya’aneinu b’yom kor’einu,” on the very day we ask.

Kinnim’s significance demonstrates the gradual progression that leads to Pharaoh’s acceptance of Hashem’s existence: dam shows Pharaoh is not god, tzfardea shows the real G-d can influence tomorrow even though we pray today, and kinnim, which the chartumim could not replicate, leads them to say “etzba Elokim hee.”

The second set of makkot teaches Pharaoh that Hashem is not just Creator, but also watches over His creation. Only the Egyptians were afflicted by the makkah of arov, not the Jews. Only the Egyptians’ animals were afflicted by the makkah of dever, not the Jews’. Only the Egyptians were afflicted by the makkah of sh’chin (including the chartumim).

The final set of makkot teaches Pharaoh that not only does Hashem watch over the world, but that He rewards and punishes those who obey and disobey Him, respectively. There is no simple discrimination between Jew and Egyptian, but between believer and non-believer. Therefore, by the makkah of barad, those Egyptians who demonstrated belief in Hashem by bringing their animals and servants inside were not harmed by the barad. Those Egyptians who did not believe, were harmed. By the makkah of choshech, Hashem punished even the non-believing Jews, removing 80% of the Jewish population. This was followed by makkat bechorot and the yetziat Mitzrayim.

The ten makkot come to strengthen our belief in a Creator Who watches over us and Who rewards and punishes those who obey and disobey him, respectively. In the merit of this emunah taught by the ten makkot, we merit the Aseret HaDibrot and the entire Torah.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov!

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