
פרשת מקץ

פרק מא פסוק א

וַיְהִי מִקְצֵי שְׁנֵתַיִם יָמִים וּפְרֻעָה חָלַם וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל-הַיָּאֵר:

רש"י

על היאור: כל שאר נהרות אינם קרויין יאורים חוץ מנילוס, מפני שכל הארץ עשויה יאורים יאורים בידי אדם ונילוס עולה בתוכם ומשקה אותם, לפי שאין גשמים יורדין במצרים תדיר כשאר ארצות:

מושג

כל שאר נהרות אינם קרויין 'יאורים' חוץ מנילוס.

Translation:

All other rivers are not called irrigation ditches except for the Nile.

Explanation:

Egypt did not receive much rain. Almost all of the irrigation of crops was done through the digging of irrigation canals, יאורים. The Nile would flow into these canals and water the fields. Rashi explains that Pharaoh was not standing by a canal, but by the Nile. However, the Egyptians called the Nile the יאור. Rashi adds that this is not the case by any river other than the Nile.

This tells us something important about the Egyptians¹. They had the audacity to take the most powerful river in the world² and call it an irrigation canal. They refused to focus on that which Hashem created and instead, took credit for the water, due to the fact that they dug the canals³.

Considering the fact that they completely depended on the Nile for their agriculture, this denial is shocking. Because of this denial of Hashem, the מכות were brought to show that Hashem completely controls nature.

Looking in the Pasuk:

Rashi focuses on the word היאור. The word means The Canal. Now since Egypt had many canals, which canal would be called *The Canal*? Rashi explains that we are actually talking about the Nile River, so to speak *The Big Canal*, which the Egyptians had decided to call a יאור instead of a נהר. This speaks volumes as to the arrogant nature of the Egyptians and their denial of Hashem.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Meaning of the words נהר and יאור and significance to Egypt.

Understand: What calling the Nile a יאור tells us about the Egyptians and what connection it has to the מכות

Think: How to analyze a Pasuk to understand the message of Chazal (יאור או נהר - (היאור או יאור).

1 See note #1

2 Actually regarded as the worlds longest river, running almost 7,000 Kilometers.

3 See note #2

NOTES

1. One could argue that this is not telling us about the Egyptians at all but simply Rashi is coming to teach us that the Nile was the only river to be used as an irrigation canal, therefore it is the only river not called a river, נהר, but יאור, a canal. This is not likely. Firstly, I would find it hard to believe that no other river was ever used as such. More importantly, the Torah would not tell us what the Egyptians called the Nile River if it was not to teach us a lesson. (Using the term יאור would only serve to confuse us into mistakenly thinking that he was standing by the irrigation canal). In short, who cares what the Egyptians called the Nile? The only conclusion is that the Torah told us this fact to teach us something about the Egyptian arrogance.

2. The Navi Yechezkel echoes this sentiment:

(פרק כט) ב בן־אדם שים פניך על־פרעה מלך מצרים והנבא עליו ועל־מצרים כלה: ג דבר ואמרת כה־אמר א־דני ה' הנני עליך פרעה מלך־מצרים התנים הגדול הרבץ בתוך יארי אשר אמר לי יארי ואני עשיתני:

“ 2. *Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt; 3. Speak, and say, Thus says the Lord G-d: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great crocodile that lies in the midst of his streams, which has said, My river is my own, and I have made it for myself.”*

This is consistent with Egyptian religion which worshiped man (Pharaoh) as a God. They also sought to solve the challenge of human mortality with an elaborate belief in a physical afterlife, basically being the first to believe that you can take it all with you.

This also explains why the Nile plays such an important role in the story. The cows come from the Nile, the children are thrown into the Nile, and the first two מצות involve the Nile. As the Navi says, the root of their sin is in that they worshiped human achievement and left no room for worship of G-d.

3. Questions for further Thought:

- a. What can be learned from the fact that the Torah tells us that Pharaoh is standing על היאור?
- b. Where else in the coming Parshios are we going to find a connection to the יאור?