
פרשת וארא

פרק ט פסוק כט

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִלְּשָׁה כְּצִאתִי אֶת־הָעִיר אֶפְרָשׁ אֶת־כַּפֵּי אֶל־יְהוָה הַקְּלוֹת יַחְדָּלוּן וְהִבָּרַד לֹא יִהְיֶה־
עוֹד לְמַעַן תִּדַּע כִּי לִיהוָה הָאָרֶץ:

רש"י

כְּצִאתִי אֶת הָעִיר: מִן הָעִיר, אֲבָל בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר לֹא הִתְפַּלֵּל לְפִי שֶׁהֵיטָה מְלֶאכֶה גְלוּלִים:

מושג

בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר לֹא הִתְפַּלֵּל לְפִי שֶׁהֵיטָה מְלֶאכֶה גְלוּלִים.

Translation: He did not pray in the city as it was filled with idols.

Explanation: While Moshe prayed previously for plagues to stop, this is the first and only time he felt compelled to leave the city to do so. Our Musag explains that he could not daven in the city as it was filled with idols. In addition, this is the only plague in which the Torah uses the term פרישת ידים to describe Moshe's prayer instead of צעקה or עתירה.

Moshe felt a need to leave the city only during ברד because in this plague Hashem had turned His attention to בני ישראל and announced the onset of the unique relationship of בני בכורי ישראל. Moshe thus tells פרעה that I no longer need to strongly beseech G-d – ויעתר - to be answered, but due to our close father-son relationship I need only to open my hands in prayer and Hashem will answer. However, this special relationship is dependent on בני ישראל acting as Hashem's children by completely rejecting idol worship, as a son can have only one father. Therefore, before appealing to Hashem as a loving father by his פרישת כפים, Moshe distanced himself from the idols found in the city.

Looking in the Pasuk: There are a number of peculiarities in the Pesukim that speak of Pharaoh requesting from Moshe to daven for the plagues to cease, and Moshe's subsequent prayer. First and foremost is the fact that Pharaoh always requests that the prayer should be an עתירה. Moshe always complies and davens with an עתירה or a close facsimile. The only exception is מכת ברד where Moshe tells Pharaoh he will daven, and indeed he does, with פרישת ידים. In addition, this is the only time where Moshe leaves the city to daven.

NOTES

Rashi's explanation of why Moshe had to leave the city to daven for the plague to stop is taken from the (יב:ה) מדרש רבה which teaches:

ויאמר אליו משה כצאתי את העיר אפרוש את כפי, מכאן שלא היה משה חפץ להתפלל בתוך מצרים לפי שהיתה מטונפת בגלולים ובשקוצים.

The commentaries are bothered by the fact that this is not the first time that Moshe has davened in Egypt. We find both in מכת צפרדע and מכת ערב that Moshe davens and does not leave the city.

The רמב"ן answers that in fact in all instances Moshe davened outside the city due to the presence of idols. However, the Torah did not record this because in the above מכות Pharaoh did not ask for the plagues to end immediately. In fact, the Torah tells us explicitly that both were only removed on the following day. Therefore, it was not important for Moshe to tell Pharaoh that he would first have to leave the city as he had plenty of time to leave and daven the following day. However, by מכת ברד where Pharaoh asks for the plague to end immediately, it was incumbent upon Moshe to tell Pharaoh that he could not daven until he left the city¹.

However, we may ask on the explanation of the רמב"ן from מכת ארבה. In ארבה, Pharaoh does not ask for the plague to be removed only on the following day. Also, the haste in which Pharaoh runs to Moshe – ויסר מעלי רק – and the words he uses to describe the plague – וימהר פרעה לקרא למשה ולאחר – point to the fact that he wanted it removed immediately. And yet, Moshe does not tell Pharaoh that he would first have to leave the city! Of course, the רמב"ן might answer that once he told Pharaoh during מכת ברד that he could not daven in the city, there was no need to tell him again.

A fascinating answer is provided by the שפתי חכמים in the name of the דבק טוב. He bases his answer on the fact that the deity of the Egyptians were their animals. Therefore, on most days the animals were out in the fields, allowing Moshe to daven in the city. However, during מכת ברד, the animals were brought into the homes in the city (those left in the fields died). Therefore Moshe was not able to daven in the city due to the presence of the animals/idols in the city².

In addition to the above question I believe there is a deeper problem presented by the idea taught in our Musag. If it is indeed problematic to daven in a city full of idols, how do we daven today in cities where idols are present? There does not seem to be any mention in Halacha that one cannot daven in a city in which there are idols.

I would like to present another possible answer by focusing on a textual anomaly found by מכת ברד. When Pharaoh asks Moshe to daven in order to stop the plagues, he always uses the same word to describe the Tefilah: העתירו³. Rashi in ספר בראשית explains the word to always refer to a strong and

¹ There seems to be a strong proof to the explanation of the רמב"ן from the מכילתא quoted by Rashi in פרשת בא (יב:א):

בארץ מצרים. חוץ לקרד. או אינו אלא בתוך הקרד, תלמוד לומר "כצאתי את העיר וגומר" (לעיל ט:כט). ומה תפלה קלה לא התפלל בתוך הקרד, דבור תמור לא כל שפן. ומפני מה לא נדבר עמו בתוך הקרד, לפי שהיתה מלאה גלולים.

The מכילתא seems to be teaching that all dialogue with Hashem took place outside of the city due to the presence of idols, proving the רמב"ן's contention.

However, we might deflect this proof due to the fact that the Pasuk on which the מכילתא comments refers to Hashem speaking to Moshe, not Moshe davening to Hashem. The proof of the מכילתא is that if we find even one instance where Moshe had to leave the city in order to speak to Hashem, most certainly Hashem would not speak to Moshe in any instance - and certainly not when relaying the very first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people - in a place where idols were present. If so, we have no proof that every time Moshe davened he was compelled to leave the city.

² This answer, however, would conflict with the מכילתא brought in the previous footnote.

³ There are four מכות in which פרעה asks Moshe to daven for the מכה to end. See צפרדע by ה:ד, ארבה by י:ז, ערב by ט:כח, and ברד by ט:כח.

consistent pleading⁴: וְאָמַר אֲנִי, כֹּל לְשׁוֹן 'עֲתָר' לְשׁוֹן הַפְּצָרָה וְרַבּוּי הוּא (בראשית כה:כא). The word is therefore completely appropriate to describe Pharaoh's desperate pleas for the plagues to cease and his request for Moshe to pray with power and persistence. In three out of the four instances in which Pharaoh uses this word in his request, Moshe seems to answer in kind. In צפרדע the Torah tells us ויצעק משה אל ה' (ח:ח), the word ויצעק a strong parallel to the word ויעתר. Both by ערב and by ארבה Moshe answers with the exact wording: ויעתר אל ה'. However, in ברד, the pattern is upset. The Torah tells us that Moshe answered Pharaoh's request differently: ויפרש את כפי אל ה' and ויפרש כפיו אל ה' (ט:לג). Instead of answering in kind with a תפילה that could be described as powerful and persistent, Moshe offers exactly the opposite, a description of a תפילה that can be termed almost passive, a simple opening in of the hands to G-d, almost like a pauper opening his hand to ask for charity⁵. What changed?

According to an idea we have previously presented⁶, מכת ברד introduced the set of מכות we term באח"ב. As explained this plague heralded a new message which would ultimately culminate with מכת בכורות. The previous plagues had been focused on punishing the Egyptians, while here Hashem begins the final redemption by turning to בני ישראל and sending them a message. It is thus the first time that Hashem speaks of the Jewish mission to the world – למען ספר שמי בכל הארץ – and thus makes it clear that we are His chosen people – בני בכורי ישראל.

Moshe fully understands the enormity of the change that has transpired, and the new relationship that has been created. Hashem has drawn close to the Jewish people, for if we are His בן then He is no longer our אדון, but our אב. Moshe relates this change to פרעה by telling him that we no longer have to pray with force and persistence to a distant master; we now have the ability to reach out to a close and beneficent father. No longer is עתירה our only mode of communication, but rather we, at times, need only to simply open our hands and Hashem will answer our prayers⁷.

This relationship will, however, always be two sided. For only when we act as sons will Hashem act in kind as a father. While a slave may have many masters, a son only has one father. Therefore, only when we reject עבודה זרה can we hope to thereby achieve the status of בני אלה. For this reason Moshe, when reaching out to G-d with a simple, almost passive, request – ויפרש את כפיו – feels compelled to distance himself from the idols present in the city. If we truly wish to achieve the exalted status of the chosen children we too must do our part to chose G-d and only G-d⁸.

Perhaps for this reason the only other time the term ויפרש כפיו is used in תנ"ך is during the dedication ceremony of the בית המקדש as the נביא (מלכים א ח:כב) writes:

וַיַּעֲמֵד שְׁלֹמֹה לְפָנָיו מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה וַיִּגְדֵּל כְּלִיקָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּפְרֹשׂ כַּפָּיו הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Only when we dedicate ourselves solely to Hashem and build Him a dwelling among us does Hashem shower His fatherly love upon us and answer our every prayer.

⁴ Rav S. R. Hirsch writes: עתר related to התר, to bore into, מחתרת, breaking-in. Hence עתר a penetrating prayer and request. Also see Rashi on שמות ט:כו where he writes: ותאמץ בתפילה... וירבה... להתפלל.

⁵ See Musag on מצודת דוד ח:כב, who writes: ויפרוש כפיו: כדרך שואל החסד, מלכים א ח:כב, who writes: ויפרוש כפיו הַשָּׁמַיִם.

⁶ See Musag on ט:כד.

⁷ In other words, until now Moshe had been dealing solely with the מדת הדין which sought to punish the Egyptians. For this reason his תפילה had to be a powerful one in order to overturn the מדת הדין. To accomplish this he required an עתירה, the the גמרא teaches:

א"ר יצחק: למה נמשלה תפלתן של צדיקים כעתר? מה עתר זה מהפך התבואה ממקום למקום, כך תפלתן של צדיקים מהפכת מדותיו של הקב"ה ממדת רגזנות למדת רחמנות. (יבמות סד.)

However, as Hashem turns His attention to the redemption of the Jewish people, is מדת הרחמים activated (the ice covering the fire) allowing Moshe to stop the plague without the need for עתירה.

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. In מכת ארבה why do you think Moshe reverted back to עתירה and did not suffice with פרישת כפיו?
- b. In what ways can we show that we choose G-d? Are there things we do that might call into question whether we truly trust only in Him?