
פרשת וארא

פרק ט פסוק כד

וַיְהִי בַרְדַּ וְאֵשׁ מִתְלַקְחֶת בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּרָד כִּבְדֵי מֵאֵד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיָה כְּמֵהוּ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאֵז הָיְתָה לְגוֹי:

רש"י ומושג

גם בתוך גס. האש והברד מערבין, והברד מים הוא, ולעשות רצון קונם עשו שלום ביניהם.

Translation: A miracle within a miracle. The fire and the hail were mixed, and even though the hail is water, in order to fulfill the will of their Creator they made peace between themselves.

Explanation: With מכת ברד the final stage of plagues, termed באח"כ, began,. This set was different in that its primary purpose was not only to punish the Egyptians, but to send an everlasting message to the Jewish people.

The creating of peace between ice and fire, which may very well symbolize the balance between מדת רחמים and מדת הדין, exists in the heavens and within the angels: עושה שלום במרומי. Hashem placed the fire within the hail as a גס בתוך גס to get the attention of the Egyptians and to show בני ישראל the power such a mixture possesses when the competing forces work together to do the will of Hashem. As the final stage towards the redemption begins, Hashem is informing the Jewish people that every society contains elements that will disagree and conflict with one another. This conflict can lead to divisiveness and chaos. While until now the common enemy of Egypt had united the people, they would now have to model the fire and ice and find a common goal and shared destiny to unite them.

Looking in the Pasuk: There are many anomalies found in מכת ברד. It is the first time that Hashem mentions that the מכות are not just a punishment to Egypt and the first time the Egyptians are given a way to protect themselves. Additionally, it is the first time the מכה contains a double miracle, the first time Pharaoh admits guilt and the first time the Torah sees fit to tell us which things were not affected. The presence of קולות which were not originally forecast, which seemed to bother the Egyptians tremendously, also requires explanation.

NOTES

In general we understand that Hashem does not create a greater miracle than is necessary. In many ways מכת ברד seems to go against this rule. First it is difficult to understand why a double miracle was needed at all. None of the previous or subsequent מכות featured a נס בתוך נס. Also of interest is the very nature of the double miracle. Why create a situation where fire and water would be forced to make peace with one another? If there would be snakes within the hail we also would call it a נס בתוך נס. Why fire? This is especially difficult to understand as we do not find anywhere in the text that the fire actually burned anything!¹ In short, there seems to be a very important message the מכה was meant to teach which required this very unique combination. What was the message and why was it important to teach just now?

In the הגדה של פסח we enumerate the עשר מכות and conclude by saying that רב יהודה placed the 10 plagues into three categories: דצ"כ עד"ש באה"ב. The הגדה, אברבנאל, in his commentary on the הגדה, explains the logic behind the content of the categories and the progression of each of the three sets. Following the words of the פסוקים which introduce each of the three sets, we find that the first set was to prove (ז:יז) אני ה' בקרב הארץ, the second set proved (ז:יח) אני ה' בקרב הארץ, while the third set proved אין כמוני בכל הארץ.

We could answer that the purpose of the ultra-miracle was to get the attention of Pharaoh and his people. While the six first plagues had most certainly made an impression on the Egyptians they had not really internalized the reality of what Hashem was doing. This is driven home by the fact that some of the Egyptians did not even bother to bring their belongings into their homes to shelter them from the hail. The Torah calls these: אשר לא שמ לב. This plague comes to get their attention: אני שולח את כל מגפוני אל לבך. In order to accomplish this Hashem sends a נס בתוך נס. The fact that the hail was perhaps the heaviest that מצרים had ever experienced would not necessarily impress them, but the fact that there was fire within the hail would. To ensure the focus of the people, Hashem added קולות which forced the Egyptians to take notice that something special was happening. They could no longer ignore the fact that G-d was speaking to them. They go so far as to call the thunder קולות אלקים and find the קולות to be unbearable: ורב מהיות קולות. For the first time the Egyptians come to the conclusion that they were being called to task for something they had done: ואני ועמי הרשעים.

However, there seems to be an additional change that takes place beginning with the plague of ברד. Until now the purpose of the plagues was focused on פרעה and the Egyptian people. They were meant to both punish the Egyptians מדה כנגד מדה for the suffering they had brought upon the Jews² and to force them to free the Jews from bondage. However, before מכת ברד we find a change. For the first time we find the מכות seemingly having significance beyond the borders of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe to tell Pharaoh: ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתיך בעבור הראותך את כבודי, but then adds ולמען ספר שמי בכל הארץ. While the first part of the Pasuk is consistent with past messages, the second half of the Pasuk contains something new. Hashem tells Moshe that in fact the message here goes beyond Pharaoh and his people. He is to tell Pharaoh that to a certain extent he has just been a tool, a means by which Hashem has spread His name throughout the world. The אור החיים comments:

ולמען ספר שמי באמצעותך בכל הארץ, פירוש כל העולם יספרו את גודלו אשר עשה למאן בדבריו.

In the same vein the עזרא אבן עזרא comments that the words ספר שמי do not refer to פרעה at all but rather should be taken to mean that these plagues will be spoken about for generations:

¹ The (שמו"ר) רבה does however mention the fact that the fire did burn them:

ותהלך אש ארצה, נדונו כמשפט הרשעים בגיהנם היה יושב נכוה בברד, עומד נכוה באש... ויהי ברד ואש מתלקחת, מהו מתלקחת? מת לקחת, לאחר שמכהו הברד לוקחו האש ושורפו.

However, the פסוקים do not tell us this explicitly, leaving us with the impression that the purpose of the fire was simply to impress upon the Egyptians that Hashem has the ability to create a נס בתוך נס.

² The Midrash talks at length about how each plague was a direct punishment for what the Egyptians had done to בני ישראל.

While the target audience of this message is somewhat unclear, the Torah clarifies this point following the plague when it tells us:

ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך את אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת אתתי אשר שמתני במ (י:ב)

These מכות were thus meant to send a message to not only Pharaoh but also to בני ישראל.

While this aspect of the purpose of the מכות may have very well applied to the first six מכות as well³, the Torah first highlights this point beginning with ברד and the last set of מכות. The explanation for this is that with מכת ברד we begin a new chapter in the מכות. The last 4 plagues – באה"ב – are all subsumed under the heading of 'The מכות בכורות'. That is to say that the seventh through ninth were all meant to be a build up to, and they themselves a type of, מכת בכורות.⁴ It is abundantly clear that מכת בכורות was meant to symbolize Hashem's unique relationship with ישראל as Hashem had told משה at the (פרק ד כב-כג) סנה:

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־פְּרֹעֹה כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה בְּנֵי בְכָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וְאָמַר אֵלֶיךָ שְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי וְנַעַבְדְנִי וְתִמְאַן לְשַׁלְּחוֹ הִנֵּה אֲנִי הֵרַג אֶת־בְּנֵי בְכָרֶיךָ:

Therefore, it stands to reason that all of the plagues in this category were to be geared towards the Jewish people, with Pharaoh simply being the tool which Hashem would use to convey the message. While this too might explain the need for a נס בתוך נס, it still begs the question why the fire and ice? What was this meant to symbolize for כלל ישראל?

The מדרש רבה on our פרשה provides a משל regarding the combination of the two competing elements:

משל למה הדבר דומה לשני לגיונות קשין שהיו נלחמין זה עם זה לימים הגיע זמן מלחמתו של מלך ועשה המלך שלום ביניהם ועשו שליחות המלך ביחד, כך אש וברד צהובין זל"ז כיון שהגיע זמן מלחמתה של מצרים עשה הקב"ה שלום ביניהם והכו במצרים.

However, the Midrash does not tell us why these two elements were needed in the first place! Again, if all that was required was a significant change in nature there are many other ways to create a נס. For example, why could we not suffice with the fact that one נס was the unprecedented amount of hail, and the second נס is the fact that Moshe predicted exactly when the hail would begin to fall⁵. And, while we might argue that this would be considered a double נס, but not a נס בתוך נס⁶, we would still wonder why a נס בתוך נס was so crucial.

While the above מדרש רבה does not provide a clue as to the message Hashem was transmitting through מכת ברד, the מדרש רבה on ספר במדבר adds more detail:

"במלך שלמה", במלך שהוא עושה שלום בין בריותיו. החיות של אש והרקיע של שלג החיות של אש שנא' (יחזקאל א) והחיות רצוא ושוב כמראה הבזק והרקיע של שלג שנאמר (שם יחזקאל א') ודמות על ראשי החיה רקיע כעין הקרה וגוי' ולא זה מכבה את זה ולא זה מכלה את זה. א"ר יוחנן כתיב (איוב כה) "המשל ופחד עמו עושה שלום במרומי" המשל זה מיכאל והוא של שלג ופחד זה גבריאל והוא של אש, מהו עמו? מושלים לו, לא זה מזיק את זה ולא זה מזיק את זה... תני רשב"י אומר הרקיע הוא של מים והכוכבים של אש והן דרים זה עם זה ואינן מזיקין זה את זה. ואפי' בין המכות הוא עושה שלום היינו הא דכתיב (זה מה שכתוב) ויהי ברד ואש מתלקחת בתוך הברד. רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה רבי יהודה אמר צלוחיות של ברד מלאות אש רבי נחמיה אמר אש וברד פתוכים (מעורבים) זה בזה. א"ר חנן טעמיה דרבי יהודה כהדא פרטתא

³ On the Pasuk (ז:ח) Rashi comments: וְאָנֹכִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת־לֵב פְּרֹעֹה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת־אֲתַמִּי וְאֶת־מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם (ז:ח) טוב לי שיתקשה לבו למען הרבות בו אותותי ותפירו אתם את גבורתי. וכן מדתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, מביא פורענות על האמות כדי שישמעו ישראל וייראו.

⁴ See in particular the כלי יקר (the גור אריה agrees partially) who uses this idea to explain the difficult Rashi on פסוק יד who refers to the words כל מגפותי as referring to מכת בכורות even though the Torah is speaking about מכת ברד. He explains that מכת ברד was a type of מכת בכורות in itself, indeed only meant to affect the first produce, the ביכורים (for if it was meant to destroy property or kill, why were the people warned? And, if it was meant to cause serious damage to produce, why not wait a bit and destroy the wheat crop?).

⁵ See Rashi on פסוק יח ד"ה כעת מחר.

⁶ Even though we do find that a double נס is called נס בתוך נס, see סוטה מז.

דרומא דחרצינתה מתחמי' מלגו (כמו פרי הרימון שהגרעין נראה בפנים) טעמי' דר' נחמיה כהדא שאשיתא דקנדילא דמיא ומשחא מעורבים כחדא והיא דלקא מן גביהון (כמו נר שמים ושמן מעורבים בה כאחד והיא דולקת עליהם). אמר רבי יהודה ב"ר סימון מהו מתלקחת מיתא ומתקלהא (מתה ושוב נאספת) לעשות שליחותם בשביל לעשות רצון בוראה א"ר אדא למלך שהיו לו ב' לגיונות קשים והיו מריבים זה לזה וכיון שהגיע מלחמתו של מלך עשו שלום זע"ז ובאו ועשו מלחמתו של מלך, כך אש וברד מריבים זה לזה וכיון שראו מלחמתו של הקב"ה במצרים נאמר ויהי ברד ואש מתלקחת בתוך הברד נס בתוך נס. According to the Midrash the joining of fire and ice is not something unique in מכת ברד, but rather an occurrence that takes place in the heavens constantly. Whether when dealing with the fiery חיות and the icy sky, or with גבריאל the angel of fire and מיכאל the angel of ice, Hashem is constantly making peace in His heavens; עושה שלום במרומו. By sending down fire in the hail, and having the two coexist, Hashem is modeling the very nature of the heavens and the angels who reside therein.

Perhaps we might propose that this is the message Hashem wished to convey to His nascent nation on the cusp of becoming a people, his בני בכורי. Until now the people had lived as individuals, the only unifying feature being a common oppressor. But now as the final process of redemption was unfolding with the onset of the מכת בכורות set of plagues, these individuals needed to learn the lesson of unity through a common goal and a shared destiny. If this lesson was not learned the experience of freedom would be one of complete chaos as the people would pull in 600,000 different directions. The innate differences between one individual and the next would tear apart the very fabric of the new society that the Egyptian slavery sought to weave. What better model to display to them than the model Hashem created in the heavens, by which the competing forces join together to fulfill the Divine will. They could look at the fiery hail and appreciate the incredible impression it made upon the Egyptians and realize the power they could wield as a people if they were to harness the many different characteristics that made up the tribes of Israel towards a common goal.

The מדרש רבה teaches that it is the ability to make peace that earns Hashem the title מלך שלמה. This is the name of Hashem that מכת ברד presents to the Jewish people. It is the name that Hashem refers to when He says למען ספר שמי בכל הארץ, and the name begins the גאולה.

The ערוך השלח⁷ explains that for this very reason we add on to the end of our davening the words עושה שלום במרומו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו. We realize that we are about to enter the 'real world' where competing ideas and divisiveness are prevalent. We pray to Hashem that He should help us find a way to bridge these differences and find peaceful resolutions much the same way that Hashem does in His heavens⁸.

⁷ הלכות ברכות השחר סימן נו אות ה

⁸ The מהרש"א (יומא נג. ד"ה שאומר) explains that we first turn to our left, which is Hashem's right side (as we are facing G-d when we daven), which symbolizes the מדת הרחמים, and then we turn to our right, which is Hashem's left, which symbolizes the מדת הדין. By turning to these two opposite sides we acknowledge the above idea of Hashem creating a bridge between the two competing and opposite מידות. This may explain the fire and ice make up of the heavens and angels themselves. Fire symbolizes דין while ice symbolizes רחמים, the two forces are at odds with each other and Hashem creates the balance between them. (We may even take this idea a step further and explain that this is why we say מימיני מיכאל ומשמאלי גבריאל who is of fire which symbolizes דין, is to the left, the place of דין, and מיכאל, who is of ice which symbolizes רחמים, is to the right, which is the place of רחמים.)

Interestingly, we may even propose that many of the fundamental arguments we find between people have much to do with those who view the world with דין and those who view it with רחמים. The most famous of such word views can clearly be seen in the arguments of בית שמאי and בית הלל. The personalities of the two as described in the Talmud (see שבת לא.) point to this difference. Even within the approaches of משה and אהרן we find a similar split. As the גמרא (סנהדרין ו:) teaches: משה היה אומר יקוב הדין את ההר, אבל אהרן אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, ומשים שלום בין אדם לחבירו. However, as in the heavens, those competing forces were able to make peace with each other and work together, as the גמרא (יבמות יד:) teaches regarding בית שמאי and בית הלל:

Questions for Further Thought:

- a. Can you think of other instances of נס בתוך נס? Why do you think they were necessary?
- b. Looking at Jewish history can you think of other reasons why this message of internal harmony might be the primary lesson that the people had to absorb at this time?