

PARSHAS BO 5778

Before Makkas Borod, Moshe Rabbeinu announced that anything living that is left outside in the field will be destroyed by the hail. This is the seventh plague. Six previous plagues have been predicted and fulfilled exactly as predicted. But we find that there are two groups of people—those who feared Hashem and followed Moshe's instructions to gather their property into the field, and those who simply ignored it and went on with life as if nothing was going to happen. How could they be indifferent to what they knew was going to happen?

One must realize that the chariots that were later used by Pharaoh to pursue Klal Yisroel were drawn by the horses of these very same yorei dvar Hashem! It seems that when they want to save their money, they fear Hashem. When they are losing their money, they are no longer in fear of Hashem.

The makkos are a lesson in human behavior and human reactions to uncomfortable realities.

Moshe comes to Pharaoh representing YKVK, and Elokei Yisroel. One God with one set of absolute rules and one people who are specially looked after by Hashem and connect to Him. Pharaoh says this is out of my frame of reference.

Most human beings operate in life within a certain defined frame of reference. When things happen outside their frame, they have to push reality a little here and smooth it over there to make things work together with their prior understanding of the world. Moshe is chiseling away at Pharaoh's frame of reference and also the frame of the Jews who have been in Egypt for 210 years. This is not so simple—especially since they have been assimilated into Egypt's culture. Now there has to be a paradigm shift which is very difficult.

In the 1880's there were all these grand sweeping ideas about human nature and human history. Much of the culture of the time was dominated by concepts of nationalism and national identity and national destiny. Much of Eastern Europe was dominated by ideas of socialism and communism and all of human history had to fit into these grand ideas. Early Zionism was built on these concepts and everything the early Zionists perceived about the world was made to fit into that framework. The whole kibbutz movement was an application of the communist ideals for human society and was an utter failure. After Communism collapsed in Russia, the last people to concede defeat were the Zionists in Israel. After Stalin was exposed as the biggest murderer in the history of world, the last place on Earth to take down his picture were the Kibbutzim in Eretz Yisroel.

Old ideas and ideologies die hard. People don't like to have their whole philosophy about the world turned upside down.

People say they are hoping for Moshiach to arrive. I often wonder if they would really accept the fact if it would actually come about. Imagine if tonight the Heavens would open and

a thunderous voice would announce, "Anochi Hashem—the geulah is here." I would bet that tomorrow there would be 15 different scientific explanations offered in the media for what would clearly be a Divine revelation. People have a deeply entrenched frame of reference and it takes a tremendous amount of honesty to move from it.

Pharaoh has his understanding of the world—he won't change it. Moshe takes his staff and throws it down. Pharaoh is not impressed—all his Chartumim threw their staffs down. But Moshe's staff swallows up all their staffs! It's not just regular magic! But then they start to explain it away. Pharaoh can't find YKVK in his book of deities.

Makkas Dam has an incredible psychological aspect to it that is absolutely fascinating when you notice it. Egypt had two chief deities that were worshipped: the Nile—which was the source of water and life, and the sun—another source of prosperity. Moshe Rabbeinu said you Egyptians worship the Nile which is the source of life? I will turn the Nile into a source of death. Everything the blood touched died. The Chartumim responded—we can also turn the Nile into blood! We don't have to pay attention to you! But they didn't even realize the contradiction. They professed to worship the Nile as their source of life! How can they just turn around and denounce their belief in the Nile? It was because Moshe was threatening their way of life and their whole conception of reality. He had to be thwarted and refuted at any cost—even at the expense of their belief in avodo zero. They couldn't stop and think about what Moshe was telling them.

There were three sets of makkos. The first set was "Ditzach".

Moshe is not just making miracles. He is showing Egypt the truth of Hashem's absolute existence and that avodo zero is false. The Nile turned to blood and then produced frogs. Their world is being destroyed by things that the Nile is producing. They can't take it.

Until now, Moshe Rabbeinu has only increased the powers of nature. There is enough within the Egyptian's mindset to explain it away. But then we have Kinim—creating a simple form of life out of dirt. This was something beyond their capacity. But the Chartumim still only call it Eitzbah Elokim—a very powerful Force of nature that creates life—it is not necessarily beyond nature.

So now we go to the next level — "Adash".

Orov—wild jungle animals invading civilization. It showed that Hashem makes intelligent distinctions between Jews and Egyptians. It is not just a blind force of nature that Moshe is tapping into. Apparently until this point, the distinctions weren't clear. Now, everyone sees these animals are not invading Jewish areas. No Jewish owned animal is affected by the plague of Dever. But wild animal and animal plagues are still within the realm of natural disasters. So is Shechin.

The last four makkos are completely supernatural. Borod was such that it shattered the Egyptians' entire world-view. No hail of such magnitude was ever experienced in their history. This clearly comes from the greatest power—there are no limits to this power. However, to drive home the point, the hail comes with fire. In nature these things cannot coexist.

Arbeh is similarly on a magnitude that has never been seen. It is beyond nature.

Now there is a tendency to ignore it—we call it cognitive dissonance in English. It was much harder to accept these makkos because it meant accepting a force that is beyond everything you know in nature. It is very difficult to take that step and say that Hashem is above nature.

The Torah gives us a context of how we are supposed to understand life and it has no analog in Western thought. As we said earlier—if there were to be a Divine revelation right now, world-wide at midnight, it would immediately be explained away and ignored. Move on. We can't allow ourselves to take it seriously and restructure our entire world-view. This is why many people have a problem adopting a genuine attitude of emunah and bitochon when it comes to making sense of events in the real world.

We have a concept of "Lev melochim ve'sorim beyad Hashem." That means the decisions made by the 5-10 politicians that have the greatest impact on the world-stage, are not really made by them through their own free-will. They are puppets being manipulated by Hashem. But unfortunately, frum Jews are still analyzing world events by the standard tools of secular political analysis. A real frum Jew believes that Hashem is using these people to guide human history in the direction that He wants it to go. But many Jews can't let go of the secular mindset, the instinct to analyze it from the pragmatic political vantagepoint.

Economic success is also dependent on Hashem's will. Hishtadlus is merely a formality—it doesn't actually bring about the results that happen. Hashem is running the word completely.

Yosef Hatzaddik was an amazing human being with incredible insight into reality. When the brothers were groveling for forgiveness, Yosef tells them in no uncertain terms: It wasn't you and it wasn't me. It was Hashem pulling the strings and manipulating all our middos—some good and some bad—to bring about the result He wanted. He wanted me in Egypt and He wanted me to rule the country and this was how He chose to do it.

Accepting that this is how history works and how economics work is very difficult. The person in charge of the U.S. economy in 2008 was supposedly an expert in the history of economics and assumed he had figured out the failsafe policy for success. But then the market collapse of 2008 happened and then he realized he left something out of his models and equations. When Hashem wants a good economy, there will be a good economy. A Ben Torah doesn't run to the analysts and the pundits to figure out what's going on. He goes to the Torah.

Rabbi Shlomo Lorencz was a religious member of the Knesset. When Ben Gurion retired, he asked Ben Gurion if he had any regrets during his long political career. Ben Gurion responded that he had none except for the exemption from the army he gave to yeshiva bochurim and avreichim. Because in hindsight, it made no sense.

When Moshe Dayan was asked the same question, he gave the same response—no regrets except for giving army

exemptions for yeshiva students. The answer is that these politicians weren't really making those decisions. It was a matter that Hashem had an interest in a certain result and he manipulated the politicians to make the proper decision.

This is our view of history. This is our view of the defense of the country and the economy. When people have their own view of the world and the Torah's view is radically different, there is a deep tension which people experience.

The Rambam says that limud Torah has to straighten out one's thought processes and attitudes and ways of interpreting the world. At some point, one has to come to grips with the fact that there is an irreconcilable clash between the Torah's way of viewing events and the secular way. One adopts the Torah way by immersing one's self entirely in the ideas and concepts of Torah.

Many people had problems with my book on Torah and science. I said they aren't problems once you take the Torah view of reality as a given and science is just a theory. Most of the questions disappear. But rather than admit that you have a scientific view of reality and that makes problems with the Torah, people prefer to say the Torah has problems and we have to adjust the Torah to resolve the conflicts. The Torah has a totally consistent way of looking at the world, but it requires accepting the Torah as an independent system that is self-sufficient.

In my book on women and Jewish Law people had problems because they were looking at the Torah through the lens of feminism. The book said we need to first look at how the Torah views women and their relationship to halacha and mitzvos and then see if feminism fits with the Torah's view or not. We don't pass judgment on the Torah from some other frame of reference. But you can only see the Torah's comprehensive view of a subject when you learn a lot of Torah.

The Rambam wrote in Moreh Nevuchim that many Jews of his day were influenced by Greek philosophy and when they saw the conflicts with the Torah, they were tempted to abandon the Torah. So the Rambam showed that even within the rational view of the world, there aren't that many contradictions with the Torah. And with the few that do contradict, we have to choose the Torah over Greek philosophy and adjust our views to conform to the Torah. He begins with the assumption that the Torah is correct and there is a minimal amount of areas which truly conflict with Greek philosophy. At that point we need an adjustment of your Greek world-view.

Others, like Rav Yehudah HaLevy, said once we are assuming the Torah is the most reliable source of truth about the world, why bother reconciling it with Greek philosophy altogether? Shatter their trust in Greek wisdom at the outset and go with our understanding of Torah straight.

We are constantly dealing with people who have a completely different world-view than that of the Torah. Torah has its own independent, logically consistent world-view.

In Makkas Borod, Moshe tells the Egyptians that the power I am in touch with is totally above everything you have ever experienced in this world. They couldn't accept it, unless it means saving their money. If not, they can't change it.

We have a basic disagreement between the Torah and the Greeks regarding Creation and the eternity of the world. The entire ancient world was on one side and we were on the other side. The Rambam said this is where we have to part ways with Greek philosophy.

There was a dispute about the size of the universe. Newton's understanding of universal gravity produced the conclusion that the universe was both infinite in time and in size. And this view became entrenched in scientific community for centuries. Until Einstein came up with his theory of relativity which predicted the expanding universe. It seemed to challenge Newton's view of the universe, so Einstein fudged his equations in order to avoid overturning the idea of an infinite universe. He did this until the facts forced him to realize that the universe is expanding and Newton was wrong. At that point, Einstein admitted that it was the biggest blunder of his life because his own theory predicted an expanding universe and he ignored it because of his need to hold on to his original frame of reference.

People are not willing to change their world-view until it hits them in the face.

There is an internal logic and consistency of Torah that underlies every gemara and every Rashi. People adopt a foreign world-view and try to fit the Torah into this foreign world-view. Being mekabel ol malchus shomayim means we accept the Torah's world-view and adopt our ideas to fit with the Torah.

It wasn't just the Egyptians who had trouble adjusting to the reality of Hashem and the falseness of avodo zoro. All the way up to Makkas Choshech, the majority of Jews couldn't bring themselves to make peace with the fact that Hashem was turning everything upside down and was taking them out of Egypt. It is shocking to contemplate. But we see this happening every day. People can be shaken up and hit with the facts, but they cannot be torn from their frame of reference. They didn't want to leave and had to be killed in Egypt.

The first plague killed the avodo zoro of the Nile and the ninth plague killed the avodo zoro of the sun—absolute darkness for the Egyptians. All the beliefs and philosophies of Egypt were being shattered and most Jews couldn't deal with it. It

entailed a radical revision of every concept they had of reality and what it means to be a human being. This is kabbolas haTorah—Hashem runs everything and things work through His system and thought-process and most Jews were simply not up for the task. The ones who were had to gradually adjust to it and it took Klal Yisroel a lot of trial and error in the midbor before they were completely ready.

The Rambam asks why was it necessary for Hashem to arrange for Christianity and Islam to take over the world? What was the point of these two religions becoming so dominant and pervasive? He answers that to go from pure avodo zoro to the revolutionary ideas of Torah and Moshiach is too radical of an adjustment. So He allowed some religions to gradually introduce these concepts to the world so it won't be so jolting when Moshiach arrives and the real truth about reality is revealed to all. So too, the adjustment proved too much for most of Klal Yisroel in Egypt because the shift in paradigms was so radical and revolutionary.

We live in a world where the whole way of thinking is anti-Torah. Torah has its own unique way of approaching everything. By the time you get to kabbolas haTorah you have to reprogram yourself to be able to align thinking to a whole different world-view. You have to allow your eyes to be open to the system of the Torah—and it is a serious adjustment for most people.

This is why when it came to Makkas Borod, a total violation of the laws of nature with fire and ice working together was necessary. If it was only natural hail, just more powerful and more intense, people could have fooled themselves that it was a natural disaster. So the fire had to be put into the hail to show that this is something totally new and beyond nature.

So too, when we learn Torah, we have to approach it within its own autonomous system, in a way that breaks through and remolds our thought-processes and our way of viewing the world.