



“And it will eat all the grass of the land that the hail had left”

The Plague of Locusts that Completed the Damage Caused by the Hail Corresponds to the Third Utterance: “Let there be a firmament between the waters”

This week's Torah-portion is parshas Bo. We would like to focus on the eighth plague HKB"H brought to afflict Mitzrayim (Shemos 10, 1):

“ויאמר ה' אל משה, בא אל פרעה כי אני הכבדתי את לבו ואת לב עבדיו למען שתי אותותי אלה בקרבו, ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך את אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת אותותי אשר שמתי בם וידעתם כי אני ה'.”

Hashem said to Moshe, “Come to Pharaoh, because I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst. And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Mitzrayim and My miraculous signs that I placed among them, that you may know that I am Hashem. Rashi comments: “Come to Pharaoh” and warn him. The commentaries ask an obvious question: Why doesn't the text mention the fact that HKB"H instructed Moshe to forewarn Pharaoh of the upcoming plague of locusts? After all, we find that a warning is mentioned explicitly before all of the other plagues.

Apropos this question, we find a wonderful chiddush in the sacred teachings of Rabbi Bunem of Peshischa and the Chasam Sofer, zy"a. They assert that with regards to the plague of locusts, HKB"H did not reveal to Moshe exactly which plague He was bringing next. Instead, HKB"H left it up to Moshe's discretion to decide which plague was most fitting to afflict Pharaoh with next. Moshe managed to perceive the will of Hashem that the next plague should be locusts—“**arbeh**.”

Based on their chiddush, we must suggest an interpretation of the following passuk (ibid. 12): “ויאמר: ה' אל משה נטה ידך על ארץ מצרים בארבה, ויעל על ארץ מצרים ויאכל את כל

Hashem said to Moshe, “Extend your hand over the land of Mitzrayim for the ‘arbeh,’ and it will swarm over the land of Mitzrayim and consume all the grass of the land—all that remained from the ‘barad’ (hail).” This passuk states explicitly that HKB"H instructed Moshe to initiate the plague of “arbeh.” Hence, we must suggest that this passuk is merely confirming that HKB"H concurred with Moshe's choice.

Now, it is incumbent upon us to understand and explain why HKB"H chose the plague of “arbeh” specifically to provide Moshe Rabeinu with this amazing opportunity—the discretion to choose the upcoming plague. Furthermore, it behooves us to examine the fact that HKB"H associated the plague of “arbeh” with the plague of “barad,” as we see in the following pesukim:

“ויאמר ה' אל משה נטה ידך על ארץ מצרים בארבה, ויעל על ארץ מצרים ויאכל את כל עשב הארץ את אשר השאיר הברד. ויט משה את מטהו על ארץ מצרים... ויעל הארבה על כל ארץ מצרים ויגח בכל גבול מצרים כבד מאד לפניו לא היה כן ארבה כמוהו ואחריו לא יהיה כן... ויאכל את כל עשב הארץ ואת כל פרי העץ אשר הותיר הברד, ולא נותר כל ירק בעץ ובעשב השדה בכל ארץ מצרים.”

We will endeavor to explain why HKB"H associated the plague of “arbeh” with the plague of “barad” both when He issued the instruction to initiate the plague and when the plague actually materialized. In the first instance, it says: “**And it will consume all of the vegetation—everything that remained after the ‘barad.’**” In the second it says: “**It consumed all the vegetation of the land and all the fruit of the tree that the ‘barad’ left behind.**” We do not find an association of two (consecutive) “makkos” with any of

the other “makkos.” This implies that there is a deeper connection between these two “makkos.” Hence, we will try to clarify what that connection is.

The Klipah of Mitzrayim Strongly Opposes the Kedushah of Torah She’b’al Peh

We will begin to shed some light on the matter by examining the narrative at the beginning of parshas Shemos describing how the galus in Mitzrayim began (ibid. 1, 8): **וַיִּקָּם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוּ הָהֵנָּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעֶצְוִם מִמֶּנּוּ, הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לּוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם הוּא עַל שׁוֹנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחָם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ וְגו’.** וַיַּעֲבִידוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּפֶּרֶךְ, וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בַּחֲמוּר וּבִלְבָּנִים וּבְכָל עֲבֹדָה. **A new king arose over Mitzrayim, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, “Behold! Bnei Yisrael are more numerous and stronger than us. Come, let us act wisely with him, lest he become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, he, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and leave the land” . . . The Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael with back-breaking labor. They embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field; all their labors that they performed with them was back-breaking labor.**

We must endeavor to explain why the Torah prefaces its account with the fact that a new Egyptian ruler rose to power **“who did not know Yosef.”** Now, according to Rashi: **He acted as if he did not know Yosef.** What difference does it make whether or not he knew Yosef? Additionally, we must endeavor to explain the significance of Pharaoh’s pronouncement: **“Let us act wisely with him.”** What was so clever about his plan to enslave Yisrael and subject them to back-breaking labor?

Lastly, it behooves us to examine an enigmatic statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 27a): **“וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה, בַּחֲמוּר, בַּקֶּל וּבַחֲמוּר, וּבִלְבָּנִים, בְּלִיכּוֹן הִלְכָתָא, וּבְכָל עֲבֹדָה בְּשָׂדֵה, דָּא בְּרִייתָא, אֶת כָּל עֲבֹדָתָם וְגו’.**” The Zohar hakadosh associates **“embittering their lives” “mortar and bricks,”** etc. with various aspects of Torah-study—such as difficult questions, “kal-vachomer,” clarification of halachos, Baraisa and Mishnah. We will endeavor to explain these obscure associations.

[Note the play on words: **“avodah kashah”** becomes **“kushya”**; **“chomer”** becomes **“kal-vachomer”**; **“leveinim”** becomes **“libun.”**]

I believe that we can explain the matter by introducing a fundamental principle gleaned from the impeccable teachings of the great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy”a, in Zera Kodesh (Bo). He teaches us that the klipah of Mitzrayim opposes Torah she’b’al peh. He provides us with an incredible “remez”: This wicked, corrupt nation is named **מצרים**, because Torah she’b’al peh begins with an open letter **“mem”** in its first Mishnah (Berachos 1, 1): **“מִי־אֵימָתִי קוֹרִין אֶת שְׁמַע בְּעֶרְבִית”**. Torah she’b’al peh concludes with a closed letter **“mem”** in its final Mishnah (Oktzin 3, 12): **“ה’ עוֹז לַעֲמּוּ יִתֵּן ה’ יִבְרַךְ אֶת עַמּוּ בִשְׁלוֹם”**.

Let us explain this “remez”: When a person opens his mouth to articulate the letter **“mem”**—**מִ**—he begins by opening his mouth with an open **מִ** and concludes with a closed **ם**, without any interruption between them. This is how a person should study Torah she’b’al peh. He should begin with the open **“mem”** of **“מִי־אֵימָתִי”** and conclude with the closed **“mem”** of **“בִשְׁלוֹם”**, without any interruptions or distractions in between. Stopping to satisfy bodily needs gives one the strength to study Torah and is an integral part of Torah-study; hence, it is considered as if one is still engaged in Torah-study.

This is the “remez” in the name **מצרים**. It begins with an open **“mem”** and concludes with a closed **“mem”**; the three letters between them form the word **יצר**. Thus, the name **מצרים** alludes to the fact that the klipah of Mitzrayim opposes a Jew’s study of Torah she’b’al peh—that begins with an open **מִ** and concludes with a closed **ם**. This concludes his sacred insight.

This explains beautifully another teaching of the Zera Kodesh (Chukas): The name **פֶּרַעִה**—Pharaoh—is an anagram for **פֶּה רָע**—evil mouth. In keeping with what we have discussed, we can propose the following: **Pharaoh** was the king and leader of Mitzrayim. As such, he was the head of the klipah that opposed Torah she’b’al peh which the Mishnah depicts as the only true **“טוב”** (Avos 6, 3): **“אֵין טוֹב אֶלָּא תוֹרָה”**—**there is no “tov” (good) other than Torah.** Therefore, the name **פֶּרַעִה** is an anagram for **פֶּה רָע** indicating that he was the head of the klipah of **מצרים** whose middle letters—**יצר**—strive to interrupt the study of Torah she’b’al peh that

begins with an open “mem” and ends with a closed “mem.” Pharaoh was the nemesis of ב”ה טו”ב.

Yosef Was the Chariot for Torah She’b’al Peh

It is with great pleasure that we will now explain why HKB”H arranged for Pharaoh himself, the head of the klipah of Mitzrayim, to appoint Yosef as the viceroy of Mitzrayim. As the passuk says (Bereishis 41, 42): **וַיֹּסֶר פַּרְעֹה: אֶת טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אוֹתָהּ עַל יַד יוֹסֵף וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי שֵׁשׁ... וַיַּרְכֵּב אוֹתוֹ בַּמֶּרְכָּבָה** **and Pharaoh removed his ring from upon his hand and put it on Yosef’s hand; he then had him dressed in garments of linen . . . and he had him ride in his second chariot (“merkavah”).**

In Ohev Yisrael, the great Rabbi of Apta, zy”a, points out several allusions in this passuk: **“וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אוֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי שֵׁשׁ”**—alludes to the fact that HKB”H adorned Yosef with the kedushah of the six (“שש”) orders of the Mishnah; **“וַיַּרְכֵּב”**—**אותו במרכבת המשנה**—he was the master of the chariot—**“merkavah”**—of the six orders of the Mishnah (note the similarity between the word “mishneh” in the passuk and Mishnah) that encompass all of Torah she’b’al peh. The Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Mikeitz) writes something similar and adds that Yosef actually merited becoming the “merkavah” of the six orders of the Mishnah.

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the passuk (ibid. 41, 45): **“וַיִּקְרָא פַּרְעֹה שֵׁם יוֹסֵף צִפְנָת פַּעֲנָח”**—**and Pharaoh named Yosef Tzaphnat Pahneiach.** Rashi provides the following clarification: **“צִפְנָת פַּעֲנָח, מִפְרֵשׁ הַצִּפּוֹנוֹת”**—**decipherer of the cryptic.** Based on our current discussion, we can suggest that Pharaoh himself pronounced this prophecy unwittingly. For, as the “merkavah” of Torah she’b’al peh, Yosef was truly **“צִפְנָת פַּעֲנָח”**—**a decipherer of the cryptic;** since Torah she’b’al peh deciphers and reveals all of the mysteries of Torah she’b’chsav. Now, Rashi adds that there is no word resembling פַּעֲנָח in Scriptures. Hence, we can suggest that Rashi is alluding to the fact that Torah she’b’al peh explains all of the things for which we cannot find a satisfactory explanation or similarity anywhere else in Torah she’b’chsav.

Now, if we combine this notion with the remarks of the great Rabbi of Apta, zy”a—that the klipah of Mitzrayim opposes the study of Torah she’b’al peh—we can suggest that HKB”H purposely arranged from the onset that Yosef HaTzaddik, as the **“merkavah of the Mishnah,”** would be appointed the viceroy—“mishneh

la’melech”—the second in command to the ruler of Mitzrayim. As it states (ibid. 42, 6): **“וַיֹּסֶף הוּא הַשְּׁלִיט עַל: הָאָרֶץ”**—**now Yosef, he was the ruler of the land.** Thus, as the actual, functional ruler of Mitzrayim, Yosef would be in a position to subdue the klipah of Mitzrayim that opposed Torah she’b’al peh.

We can suggest that this is why Yosef advised his father and his brothers to settle in the land of Goshen when they arrived in Mitzrayim. His reason for this suggestion was (ibid. 46, 34): **“כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת מִצְרַיִם כָּל רוֹעֵה צֹאן”**—**since every shepherd is an abomination to Mitzrayim.** In keeping with this discussion, Yosef was alluding to the fact that the Egyptians loathe the scholars of Torah she’b’al peh; for they are the trustworthy shepherds of the holy flock of klal Yisrael. Thus, he was advising his family that it is best to distance themselves from the Egyptians—i.e., by settling in Goshen—so that they would be able to engage in the study of Torah she’b’al peh without interference.

It appears that we can also explain the reason for the Egyptians’ intense opposition to Torah she’b’al peh based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Gittin 60b): **“לֹא כֹרֵת הַקֶּבֶה בְּרִית עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲלָא בְּשִׁבְלֵי דְּבָרִים שֶׁבַעַל פִּה, שְׁנֹאמֵר: ”****HKB”H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the Oral Law, as it states (Shemos 34, 27): “For according to these words have I entered a covenant with you and with Yisrael.”** The reason for this can be explained based on a passuk in parshas Kedoshim (Vayikra 20, 26): **“וַאֲבָדִיל אֶתְכֶם מִן הָעַמִּים: ”****and I have separated you from among the nations to be Mine.** Rashi comments: **If you are separated from them, then you are Mine; but if not, then you belong to Nevuchadnetzar and his colleagues.**

Now, we learn in the Midrash (S.R. 47, 1) that HKB”H said to Moshe Rabeinu: **הַמִּקְרָא אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָהֶם בְּמִכְתָּב, וְהַמִּשְׁנָה וְהַתְּלֻמוֹד וְהָאֲגָדָה אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לָהֶם עַל פִּה, שֶׁאִם יָבוֹאוּ עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים וַיִּשְׁתַּעֲבְדוּ—****I am giving them the Written Law in writing; the Mishnah and the Talmud and the Aggadah, I am giving them orally; so that if idolaters come and enslave them, they will remain separate from them.** Thus, we learn that as a result of studying Torah she’b’al peh, Yisrael separate themselves from the other nations of the world.

Since Pharaoh Opposed Torah She'b'al Peh He Did Not Recognize Yosef the Merkavah of Torah She'b'al Peh

This illuminates for us the deeper implication of the text cited above: **"A new king arose over Mitzrayim, who did not know Yosef."** In other words, he opposed the kedushah of Yosef, who was the "merkavah" of Torah she'b'al peh. **"He said to his people, 'Behold! Bnei Yisrael are more numerous and stronger than us'"**—on account of the covenant they entered into with HKB"H involving Torah she'b'al peh. Therefore: **"הבה נתחכמה לו"**—let us act wisely, by preventing them from receiving and studying Torah she'b'al peh; **"פן ירבה"**—for by increasing their study of Torah she'b'al peh, they will set themselves apart and distinguish themselves from all the other nations, including the Egyptians. If that happens, and **"should a war occur, he, too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and leave the land."**

Therefore, Pharaoh strategically enslaved and oppressed Yisrael, as it says: **"The Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael with back-breaking labor. They embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field; all their labors that they performed with them was back-breaking labor."** They figured that bitter enslavement and back-breaking labor with mortar and bricks would discourage them from accepting the Torah, as it is written (Shemos 6, 9): **"ולא שמעו אל משה"**—**and they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of breath and hard labor.**

We can now begin to make sense of the elucidation in the Zohar hakadosh: **"They embittered their lives with hard work,"** namely the various aspects of Torah-study—such as difficult questions (**"kushya"**), **"kal-vachomer," clarification ("libun") of halachos, Baraisa and Mishnah.** The Zohar is teaching us that Pharaoh's intent was to prevent Yisrael from engaging in the study of Torah she'b'al peh, which involves resolving difficult issues, applying the principle of **"kal-vachomer,"** and clarification of halachos in Mishnayos and Baraitot.

Nevertheless, the Torah attests to the fact that Pharaoh's plan backfired and had the opposite effect (ibid. 1, 12): **"וכאשר יענו אותו כן ירבה וכן יפרוץ"**—**but the more**

they oppressed them, the more they increased and burst forth. In fact, the difficult servitude actually cleansed Yisrael of the contamination and perversion of the nachash, enabling them to receive the Torah. As it is written (Devarim 4, 20): **"ואתכם לקח ה' ויוציא אתכם מכור הברזל"**—**but Hashem has taken you and withdrawn you from the "iron crucible," from Mitzrayim, to be a nation of heritage for Him, as this very day.** Rashi explains that an **"iron crucible" ("כור הברזל") is a vessel in which they refine gold.**

This then is the message conveyed by Rashi (Shemos 1, 12): **According to the Midrashic interpretation, the Holy Spirit is saying, "You say "פן ירבה", but I say, "כן ירבה".** In other words, Pharaoh said, **"Lest it will increase"**—because his aim was to prevent Yisrael from receiving and accepting Torah she'b'al peh by burdening them with strenuous labor. HKB"H, however, said, **"It shall indeed increase"**—because Yisrael received the Torah specifically in the merit of and on account of the strenuous labor they endured in Mitzrayim.

The Ten Makkos in Mitzrayim Correspond to the Ten Utterances with which the World Was Created

Following this intriguing line of reasoning, we will proceed to explain why HKB"H gave Moshe Rabeinu the power to pick this plague himself—namely, the plague of **"arbeh."** The Chiddushei HaRim, zy"a, teaches us a fascinating concept. The **"ten makkos"** HKB"H visited upon the Egyptians align with the **"ten utterances"** with which the word was created—in reverse order. In other words, **"blood"**—the first makkah—aligns with the tenth utterance; **"frogs"**—the second makkah—aligns with the ninth utterance; and so on and so forth until **"Makkas Bechoros"**—the tenth makkah, **"the Plague of the Firstborn"**—which aligns with the first utterance (Bereishis 1,1): **"בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ"**. According to this scheme, the plague of **"arbeh"**—the eighth makkah—aligns with the third utterance (ibid. 6): **"ויאמר אלקים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים"**—**G-d said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters, and let it separate between water and water."**

To better understand the relationship between the eighth makkah and the third utterance, we will begin by focusing on the third utterance: **"G-d said, 'Let there be a firmament between the waters, and**

"אם הלכה כמותי מן השמים יוכיחו, יצאתה: Rabbi Eliezer declared: **But if the voice of heaven will be with me, it will be proved from the heavens. A heavenly voice went out and proclaimed, "What argument do you have with Rabbi Eliezer, whom the halachah follows in all places?"** Rabbi Yehoshua stood up on his feet and replied (Devarim 30, 12): **"It is not in heaven."** What is meant by: **"It is not in heaven?"** Rabbi Yirmiyah said: **For, the Torah was already given on Har Sinai.** (The Gemara returns to Rabbi Yehoshua's response.) **We do not heed a heavenly voice; for, You already wrote in the Torah at Har**

Therefore, HKB"H demonstrated this distinction between Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh specifically in relation to the plague of "arbeh." The command: "בא אל פרעה" was a form of Torah she'b'chsav—it was a direct command from Hahem; while Moshe's independent choice of "arbeh" was a form of Torah she'b'al peh. By agreeing with Moshe's choice, HKB"H revealed the incredible power He had bestowed upon Torah scholars down on earth. This power was absolute in the sense that no halachah can be decided in the heavens. As stated in the Gemara, it is no longer in the heavens; hence, all halachic decisions are determined by human courts down below.

This explains very nicely the remez inherent in the passuk: "ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן בנך את אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת אותותי אשר שמתי בם"—and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Mitzrayim and My miraculous signs that I placed among them. We will refer to what the Bnei Yissaschar writes in the sefer Maggid Ta'alumach on Maseches Berachos (2a), and what is brought down in the sefer Kol Eliyahu (Yoma 202) in the name of the Gra. They address the words "ודברת בם" Krias Shema, meaning "you should speak of them." They assert that the term "בם" alludes to Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh as follows: Torah she'b'chsav begins with the letter "beis" of "בראשית ברא אלקים", while Torah she'b'al peh begins with the letter "mem" of (Berachos 2a): "מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבין". Likewise, this is the remez in our passuk: "ולמען תספר באזני בנך" refers to Torah she'b'al peh which is transmitted from a father's mouth to his child's ear; "ואת אותותי אשר שמתי בם" connects Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh via the term "בם", which is formed by the first letters of בראשית and מאימתי.

The Remarkable Relationship between the Plague of "Arbeh" and the Plague of "Barad"

We can now rejoice, for we have succeeded in shedding some light on the subject. We can now begin to comprehend why HKB"H arranged for the plague of "arbeh" to complete the devastation of the plague of "barad." As explained, the "ten makkos" align with the "ten utterances" in reverse order. Thus, the plague of "barad" aligns with the fourth utterance (Bereishis 1, 9): "ויאמר אלקים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן"—G-d said, "Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. Similarly, the plague of

"arbeh" aligns with the third utterance: "Let there be a firmament between the waters."

Now, in his commentary, Rashi asks (Bereishis 1, 7): Why does it not say "כי טוב" on the second day (as it does on the other days of creation)? Because the work of the creation of the water was not completed until the third day, although He began it on the second day. And something which is incomplete has not yet achieved its full potential and goodness. Accordingly, the utterance "Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area" is the completion of the utterance "Let there be a firmament between the waters."

With this in mind, let us suggest an interpretation of the phenomenal fourth utterance: "Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area, and let the dry land appear." This utterance alludes to the fact that HKB"H covered up and concealed Torah she'b'al peh beneath dry land, so that it would be inaccessible to the nations of the world. Only Yisrael, by means of toiling and dedicating themselves to the study of Torah, are able to uncover it and reveal its treasures. This is the implication of the teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 5, 22): "הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה"—delve into (turn) it over and over again, for it contains everything.

This explains magnificently the relationship between the plague of "barad" and the plague of "arbeh"; they complemented each other. As explained, these two makkos align with the third and fourth utterances of creation—"יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד" and "יהי רקיע בתוך המים"—that complement one another. Hence, it is not for naught that the Torah emphasizes the fact that the locusts consumed all of the vegetation and fruits of the tree that remained after the hail: "ויאכל את כל עשב הארץ ואת כל פרי העץ אשר הותיר הברד".

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